Commentary

Volume Sixty-four, Number Two, August 1977

ON BEING BLOCKED & OTHER LITERARY MATTERS
Henry Roth

RUSSIA— BEYOND BREZHNEV
Walter Laqueur

NEW YORK AND/OR JERUSALEM
Robert Alter

IRON— A MEMOIR
Primo Levi

AMERICAN JEWS: STILL A DISTINCTIVE GROUP
Charles S. Liebman

Fiction: HISTORY INTO ART
John Romano

Books in Review:
Edward N. Luttwak
R.J. Herrnstein
Jane Larkin Crain
James H. Lehmann
Michael Ledeen
William J. Bennett
Stephen Haseler

The Politics of Human Rights

Daniel P. Moynihan

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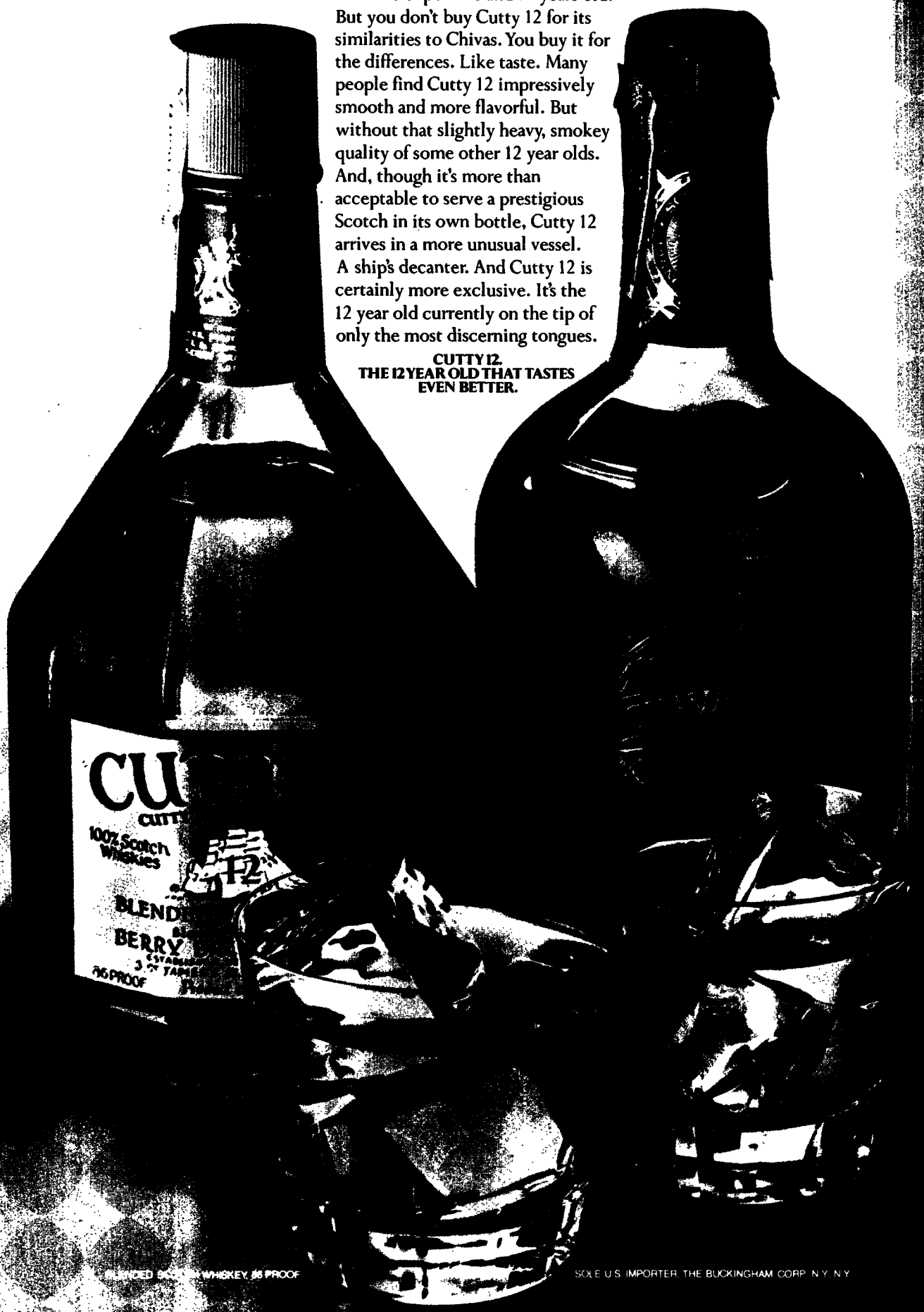

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Commentary

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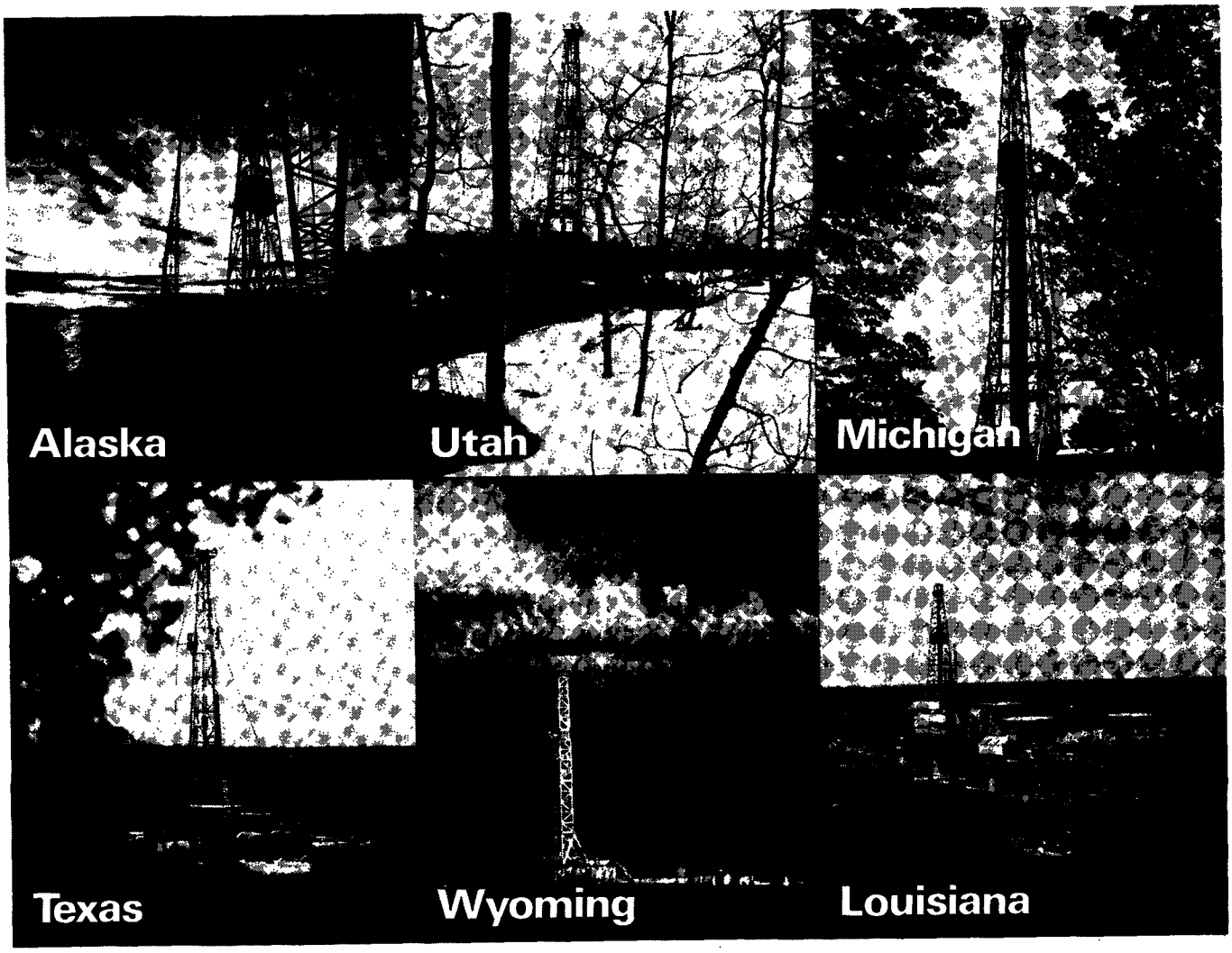

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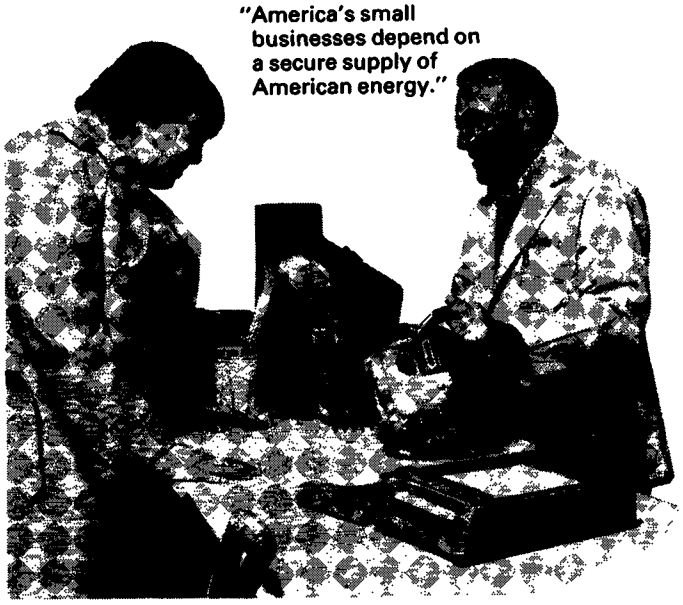

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Letters from Readers

The New Thanatology

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

"O Death, Where Is Thy Sting-a-Ling-a-Ling?" by Leslie H. Farber [June] caused me to think back on the deaths in my own family and to try to see where the new death-liberationists could help me. The few works I have seen in this new how-to arena have offended more than comforted me. . . .

What is most upsetting in this fad is the emphasis on understanding the death process in a rational manner. This stress leaves out, as Dr. Farber understands very well, the real importance of life, which is not so amenable to simple, rational analysis. . . . The stages and responses to dying are viewed, but the essentials of life, which give meaning to death, are slighted. What we are in reality liberated from is not death, but life. . . . Thanks to this research, we have not been comforted . . . but deceived into thinking we have obtained understanding. . . .

ROBERT BLUMSTOCK
Hamilton, Ontario

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Leslie H. Farber's essay would have been more persuasive if he himself had not permitted the grotesque non-Jewish funeral of his own old, immigrant father. Dr. Farber was an agent, thereby, of the very falsification of death which he decries.

SAMUEL MENASHE
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Leslie H. Farber's critique of the new death cult is witty, wicked, and often wise. But as a teacher of a psychohistory course, "Americans in the Presence of Death," I should like to suggest some qualifications to his argument. . . .

American college education should be in part an exercise in brainwashing of a therapeutic kind—an effort to wash out of young minds a part of the trivializing nonsense put there with great skill by the mass media. There should be an attempt to remind young people of the fundamental things—birth, love, suffering, death. To a disturbing degree Americans see themselves as the advertisers, their real gurus, picture them; they are consumers. Arthur Miller makes the point well: "Years ago a person he was unhappy, didn't know what to do with himself—he'd go to church, start a revolution—something. Today you're unhappy? Can't figure it out? What is salvation? Go shopping."

Obviously the contemplation of one's own death provides an avenue of escape from becoming totally a creature of the commercial culture with its conventional wisdom. There is something unconditioned and very lonely in the *idea* of death. E. M. Forster noted: "Death destroys a man, but the idea of death saves him."

A second reason for courses on death is to escape from the overwhelming burden of modern knowledge. There should be room for a "higher dilettantism" in the college curriculum; a few courses might be halfway between a bull session and a regular college course with its massive body of scholarly learning. Ernest Becker, in *The Denial of Death*, . . . writes: "I would . . . run the risk of simple-mindedness in order to make some dent in the unintended imbecility brought about by specialization and its mountains of fact." Dr. Farber finds Becker's book simple-minded, perhaps because of his own rather laconic, pragmatic temperament. . . . But reasonableness is not the only answer; the hell-benders and heaven-stormers, like Maslow, Rank, Becker, *et al.* are useful citizens too.

RICHARD BIRDSALL
Connecticut College
New London, Connecticut

LESLIE H. FARBER writes:

To Samuel Menashe: In my account of my father's Americanization, I omitted, in an excess of tact, perhaps, what we all know: that not all the difficulties to be endured in that process sprang from the Gentile community. Always to be contended with was the insolent and condescending piety of those fellow Jews who would, whatever the circumstances, measure a man by his rituals. (Mr. Menashe outdoes the new thanatologists in his prescriptive presumption.) My father at the end of his life was old, yes, and immigrant, no; he had, with courage and against great odds, both become an American and remained a Jew.

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To Richard Birdsall: Perhaps this is another "question of language." When I am asked to entertain "therapeutic brainwashing" in the cause of a "higher dilettantism," I simply tend to lose my bearings. I would remind Mr. Birdsall that it is not necessary to make a purchase to qualify as a consumer. Ideas, too, have their currency in the marketplace, and he is trading in some of the trendiest. It's not quite as obvious to me as it is to Mr. Birdsall that "the contemplation of one's own death provides an avenue of escape from becoming totally a creature of the commercial culture with its conventional wisdom." Perhaps the reverse, in fact. As E. M. Forster would surely have said, if given the opportunity, "The idea of death may save a man, but not if he gets college credit for it."

As for Becker and Maslow being hell-benders and heaven-stormers—what? Those page boys of the *Zeitgeist*? At this point I fear we have abandoned a common tongue.

Switzerland & Europe

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Michael Ledeen's article, "Europe Breaks Apart" [May], is unfortunately typical of the naive and less than well-informed ideas that characterize much of the thinking of American experts on European affairs. Trying to discern "trends" in Europe is about as meaningful as trying to discern trends in the Western hemisphere. The political situations in Norway and Greece are no more closely related than those in Canada and Guatemala. And the repeated references to the situation in Malta in an article on European politics are as ludicrous as referring to the situation in Haiti as an augur for forthcoming U.S. congressional elections. From places far away, such as Washington, Europe may seem to be a geopolitical entity, but in fact, most European countries have little in common except proximity, which usually translates into a history of thousands of years of armed conflict.

Mr. Ledeen's assertion that "Switzerland regularly considers legislation to send all foreigners out of the country," is both factually incorrect and misleading. The statement is incorrect since none of the three soundly defeated initiatives *"contre l'emprise étrangère"* would have required *all* foreigners to leave Switzerland. The last, and most severe of the initiatives, would

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have placed a limit on the number of foreigners resident in Switzerland at 10 per cent of the indigenous population (20 per cent for Geneva), and would have required the government gradually to reduce the foreign population to this limit over a number of years. The statement is misleading because it fails to account for the particularities of the situation in Switzerland. Switzerland is a small country, about twice the land area of New Jersey, with an indigenous population of less than 6 million. . . . The population of Switzerland is 50 per cent Protestant and 50 per cent Catholic, there are German-, French-, and Italian-speaking cantons (states). Although Switzerland has common frontiers with France, Germany, Austria, and Italy, and has been subjected to intense ideological and military pressure over the centuries, it has maintained its independence and practiced the same highly democratic form of government for the last seven hundred years (the only deeply rooted, indigenous democratic society on the European continent). Further, landlocked Switzerland, with few natural resources, is one of the most stable and prosperous countries in the world.

However, as recently as the 1930's, Switzerland could not support its own population, and many of the million Swiss who reside abroad are descendants of those who left their homeland to find work. Today, about one million foreigners, mainly Italians and Spanish, reside in Switzerland. In addition to the resident foreigners there are several hundred thousand *"frontaliers"* (foreigners who work in Switzerland while residing in frontier zones of neighboring countries) and *"saisoniers"* (foreign workers who reside only part of the year in Switzerland). More than 40 per cent of the population of Geneva are foreigners. Thus, in a country which has struggled for centuries to maintain its cultural and political independence, which until recently was overpopulated and subject to severe unemployment, and which today is an island of stability and prosperity in a sea of conflict and violence, it was perhaps inevitable that a political movement would arise to advocate the limitation of the foreign population, a foreign population drawn mainly from the turbulent southern European countries, which, it was feared, would upset the political stability and

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delicate religious and linguistic balance which is the heart of the Swiss system. (It is revealing that the Swiss left-wing parties are strong advocates of extending political rights to foreigners.) Despite this situation, there is relatively little support for anti-foreigner laws in Switzerland. Only a few small right-wing parties advocate such laws. Under the Swiss system fifty thousand signatures in favor of a proposed law are sufficient to require the government to conduct an "initiative" (referendum). There have been three anti-foreigner initiatives, all defeated, the most recent one by a two-to-one margin. In the light of these facts, Mr. Ledeen's statement that Switzerland is a "virulently chauvinistic nation" is, to say the least, misleading.

I have described in some detail the Swiss "particularities" to illustrate that opinions concerning the political situation in European countries must be based on knowledge of the history, culture, and actual situation in the countries concerned. . . .

KENT GORDIS

Geneva, Switzerland

MICHAEL LEDEEN writes:

I am grateful to Kent Gordis for the excellent documentation he has provided for my claim that Switzerland, like Germany, has seen the growth of a virulent chauvinism. At the same time, I stand corrected on one particular—only nine out of ten foreigners would have been expelled if the most recent referendum had passed, and not everyone.

Mr. Gordis's letter is, of course, not a denial at all, but an apology for the phenomenon I described. He says, quite rightly, that this xenophobia is hardly surprising under the circumstances (indeed he sees it as "perhaps inevitable," a claim I did not make), but attempts to pass it off as an epiphenomenon. COMMENTARY readers may judge for themselves: three referenda in recent years, with between 30 and 40 per cent voting in favor of expelling foreigners, is, to my mind, a significant development in a country which traditionally gave lessons to the rest of the West in toleration and civic virtue.

As for his brief attack on my naiveté and ignorance, once again Mr. Gordis only supports what I wrote: that the attempt to create the structures of European unity is failing, that nationalism of quite a traditional sort is again the dominant phenomenon on the continent, and that all of this has provided an opening for forces working against America's (and Europe's) true security and freedom. Far from seeming to be "a geopolitical entity," Europe appears to be —as the title of my article suggested— flying apart. If Mr. Gordis thinks it's somehow outrageous to find Malta included in this discussion, he should consult the makeup of the NATO forces, which found room for Maltese bases. Or, better, he ought to visit the headquarters of the Order of the Knights of Malta on the Aventine Hill in Rome, which would tell him a great deal about the important role Malta has played in the West for several centuries. Indeed, he may well thank Malta for the fact that Switzerland is half-Catholic and half-Protestant, and not part of Islam.

The Hostage Mentality

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

As one of the more than 100 hostages held for thirty-eight hours at the B'nai B'rith building last March, I am outraged by Dorothy Rabinowitz's uncomprehending observations in "The Hostage Mentality" [June]. Every hostage case is unique and must be tried, judged, and evaluated on its own merits. What Miss Rabinowitz has done . . . is to twist the facts of a specific case to fit a predetermined formula of questionable credibility.

Miss Rabinowitz's theory, according to which the hostages identify with the aggressors, may well fit the other case she cites, that of the Croation airplane hijacking of September 1976, but our case was different. Whereas the identification-with-the-aggressor syndrome relies on close personal contact and prolonged dialogue between the perpetrators of the terrorist act and their victims, in the B'nai B'rith building hostages were not allowed to speak, converse, or ask any questions of their captors. All such attempts were either disregarded or met with threats of violence: we were not to question, only to listen. And what we listened to were, for

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the most part, threats against our lives and attacks on the Jewish people.

Furthermore, the quotations Miss Rabinowitz cites as expressing sympathy and compassion for Khaalis and the other Hanafis were taken out of context from newspaper accounts which appeared in the days immediately following the release of the hostages. Miss Rabinowitz herself acknowledges, near the end of her article, that at such a time feelings of gratitude for not having endured the final brutality—of murder itself—might overwhelm simultaneous feelings of anger, hostility, and fear. But the "peculiar nature" of these quotations has to do with more than just the time at which they were given. Is it not possible to respond to terrifying incidents with more complexity and subtlety than Miss Rabinowitz is willing to acknowledge? Is it not possible to feel compassion for someone who has lived through the brutal murders of members of his immediate family and at the same time to feel anger and hatred toward this same person for shooting at colleagues and threatening to cut off heads? Is it not further possible that, in facing what we thought was certain mass death, we sought to understand (and still do) the matrix of history that brought us to the point of those Hanafi guns?

Miss Rabinowitz seems not to have bothered to talk to any of the hostages in person or to have picked up any recent edition of the Washington *Post*, which daily has reported the testimony of some sixteen ex-hostages from the B'nai B'rith building against their former captors. Can this participation in the trial, as witnesses for the prosecution, be considered by any stretch of the imagination as a "collaboration" with our former captors or as serving "the further dissemination of the terrorists' 'message' "?

The absurdity—even the perversity—of Miss Rabinowitz's argument is further evidenced by her quoting one hostage as saying that the only people she "feared" were the police upon their arrival in the building. The fact is that at the moment of liberation the hostages were expecting gunfire, and so when the most unexpected event of all occurred—the arrival of our liberators, the police—there was at first shock and confusion. But almost immediately that "fear" that something still worse was to happen to us was transformed into great joy and jubilation. Hostages hugged the police, shook their hands, thanked them profusely. As a matter of record, B'nai B'rith gave Washington's police chief, Maurice J. Cullinane, a special humanitarian award at a public convocation of thanksgiving. In fact, this award was personally presented to Police Chief Cullinane by one of the ex-hostages.

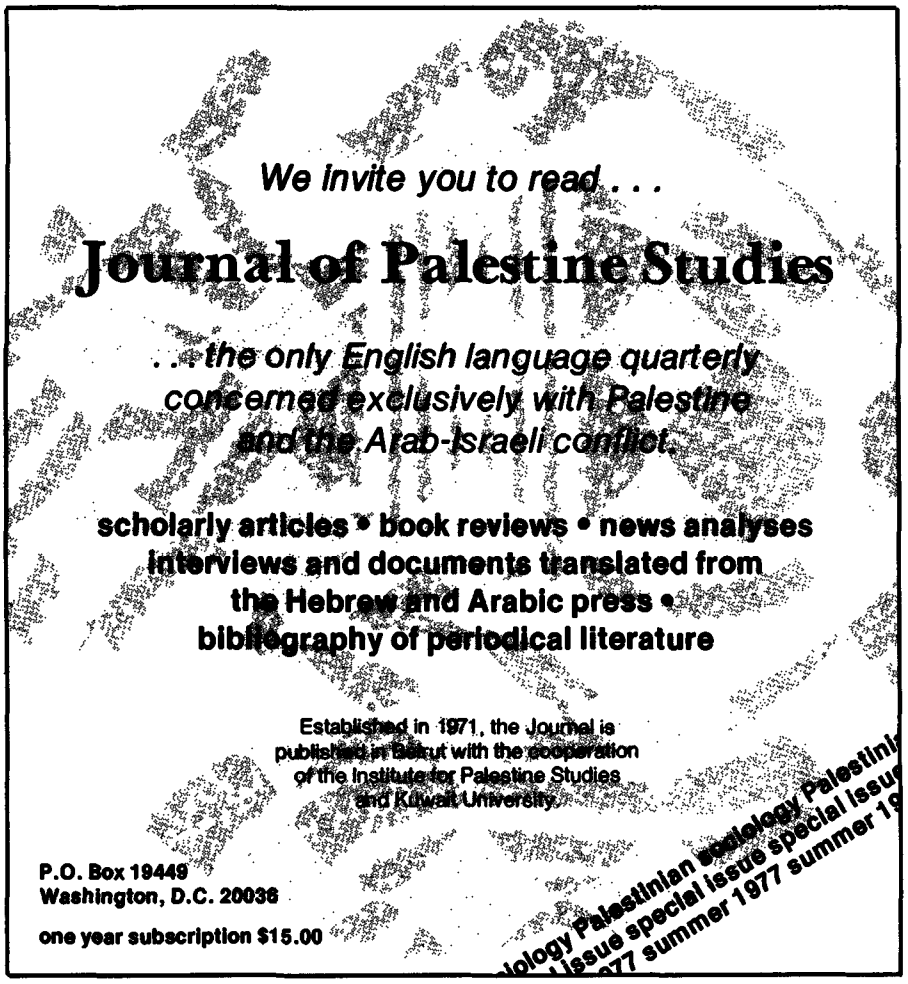
Miss Rabinowitz accuses the majority of the nation's newspapers and magazines of being staffed by "that special society of editorial writers and 'advocacy' journalists whose business it is to serve as the nation's liberal conscience." I lack confidence in both the conscience and the consciousness of the author of such wrong-headed observations. The conscience of the B'nai B'rith hostages is clear.

DIANE COLE
National Jewish Monthly
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Viewed from a distance, orderly patterns are easily discerned in human behavior, but seen close up, such behavior, especially under conditions of stress, is usually chaotic and confused. Therefore, to run together a series of quotations from individuals . . . who have just been subjected to a traumatic experience seems either unrealistic or selective or both. . . . It is quite natural for a captive in a hijacked plane, a barricaded office, or even a concentration camp to want to get close to his captors for both emotional and pragmatic reasons since such behavior has often proved highly successful in terms of the primary goal, which is to escape from confinement unscathed. One wonders what the results might have been had the Hanafi captives expressed the fine philosophic principles of Miss Rabinowitz to their captors. . . .

What also needs to be said is that human emotions, especially under stress, are generally conflicting. . . . What these people felt at one moment they may not have felt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at another. . . . And that people have conflicting feelings simultaneously is so well accepted as to be a truism. . . .

FREDERIC WILE
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Dorothy Rabinowitz draws useful attention to the puzzling phenomenon that hostages not infrequently become sympathetic to their captors during captivity, and usually retain their sympathy after they are released. She implies that what is happening is that the victims thereby attest "to their own 'advanced' attitudes of social awareness and responsibility. . . ." Miss Rabinowitz's observation is sound, . . . but I cannot agree with her conclusion. . . .

The tendency to sympathize with criminals and justify their antisocial acts is . . . complex . . . and usually has social, political, and economic roots in addition to psychological ones. No simple psychological generalization would apply to all instances. The hostage mentality, on the other hand, is a psychologically simpler phenomenon. A precursor of it can be seen in the phenomenon described by Harry Harlow in the case of his experimental monkeys. Harlow observed that if infant monkeys were deprived of their natural mothers and placed with inanimate models of monkey mothers with various noxious attributes, the infants clung more tightly the more they were hurt.

Among humans, too, the more hostile the mother, the more tightly the infant clings to her and the more reluctant he is to separate and mature. Adults who come to psychiatric treatment tied to their mothers with pathological intensity usually describe childhood experiences of intense maternal hostility. In many marriages, too, we find that a dependent spouse will cling more tightly, the more hostile, abusive, and contemptuous the partner is. In such instances, the dependence of the helpless child upon a hostile mother is replayed in the marriage.

The mechanism by which these phenomena are determined provides that when one feels helplessly controlled by another individual, one makes every effort to cling to that individual, even at times by abject submission in order to appease. I am describing not a conscious deception, but an automatic tendency operating at a primitive level, and creating appropriate affects and sentiments. It is not unrelated to the phenomenon called "brainwashing," and to masochism. This is the psychological basis for the hostage mentality.

That the sentiment persists after release, can be understood as a common reluctance to admit that one's sentiments have been irrationally determined, a desire to justify them as expressions of high, principled morality rather than as a primitive response to anxiety.

[Dr.] MORTIMER OSTOW
Riverdale, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

My meager supply of words does not allow me to express the admiration I felt on reading "The Hostage Mentality." . . . Miss Rabinowitz deftly sorts out the real reasons for the kind of deviant behavior she describes. . . . It surely does come down, in the end, to the chasm between the elitists who can afford the luxuries of certain attitudes and the masses who must experience the consequences. . . .

ROY TRABAND
Albuquerque, New Mexico

DOROTHY RABINOWITZ writes:

I notice that Diane Cole, who objects to quotations from hostages being taken "out of context," does not deny the accuracy of any I mentioned, including the one from Bernard Simon, whose New York *Times* article exemplified some of what I called "the hostage mentality." I have no doubt that the conscience of the B'nai B'rith hostages is "clear"; that is as it should be. That a clear conscience does not necessarily indicate a clear mind is evident not only from Miss Cole's letter but is, as Frederic Wile would say, so well accepted as to be a truism. Mr. Wile did not read, or perhaps did not wish to notice, the lines in my article which made quite clear that my objection was to the behavior of the hostages *after* their release. No one required of them that they express "philosophic principles" to their captors or do anything other than obey them. What one asked was that the hostages refrain after their release from the expression of self-aggrandizing principles—Miss Cole's inflated comment about the "matrix of history" is a perfect example—which serve only to confer dignity and reason on acts of lunacy and barbarism.

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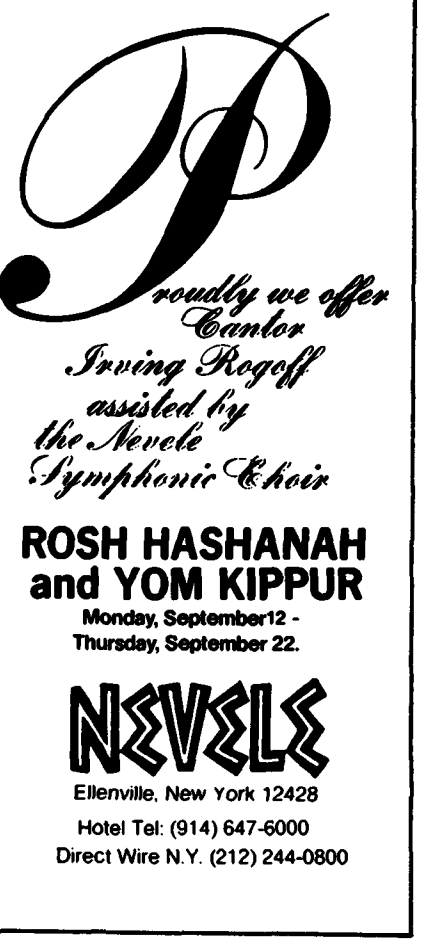

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The First Amendment

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his review of Walter Berns's *The First Amendment and the Future of American Democracy* [Books in Review, May], William J. Bennett criticizes Berns for "urging original understandings that push aside those of Jefferson and Madison" in respect to the religious clauses of the First Amendment. But though he cites Madison's separationist views accurately enough, Mr. Bennett does not show that they were precisely what the First Amendment clauses originally meant. That understanding emerged from a compromise between separationists, both pietistic and rationalistic, and supporters of state aid to religion.

The Senate did not get House approval on the narrow meaning of "establishment" as fixing a national creed; but the House, on the other hand, finally dropped from Madison's resolutions the prohibition against laws "infringing the rights of conscience"—perhaps a concession to those who would not go so far as to protect nonbelievers as well as believers, a guarantee that Jefferson and Madison had won in the Virginia battle. In any event, Madison lost what was to him "the most valuable Amendment in the whole list," the one applying the religious clauses to actions by the states.

If I may be permitted to quote myself:

> Madison's colleagues at Philadelphia were not prepared to substitute his clear principles for the mixed pattern that prevailed in the states. They went along with him to guard against the danger that Congress, in exercising some granted power, such as taxation, might meddle in religious matters; but while they set a national barrier against the possibility of discriminatory taxation on behalf of any church, they also set one against congressional interference with local efforts to foster religious enterprises. Americans absorbed the First Amendment's clauses on separation and free exercise so that they were compatible with a dominant belief that separation was also in some ways a linkage, that liberty and Christianity were close friends, and that a federal union entitled even nonbelievers to hold office at the national level, while permitting states to restrict full political rights to Protestants. Neither pietists nor Jeffersonians could have been fully satisfied with the results. A modern Supreme Court majority would tend to forget this point when it looked backwards at the original understanding through the eyes of the Fourteenth Amendment and with an individualistic, noninstitutional attitude toward religion that would have been quite congenial to Madison and his evangelical supporters [*The New Heavens and New Earth: Political Religion in America*].

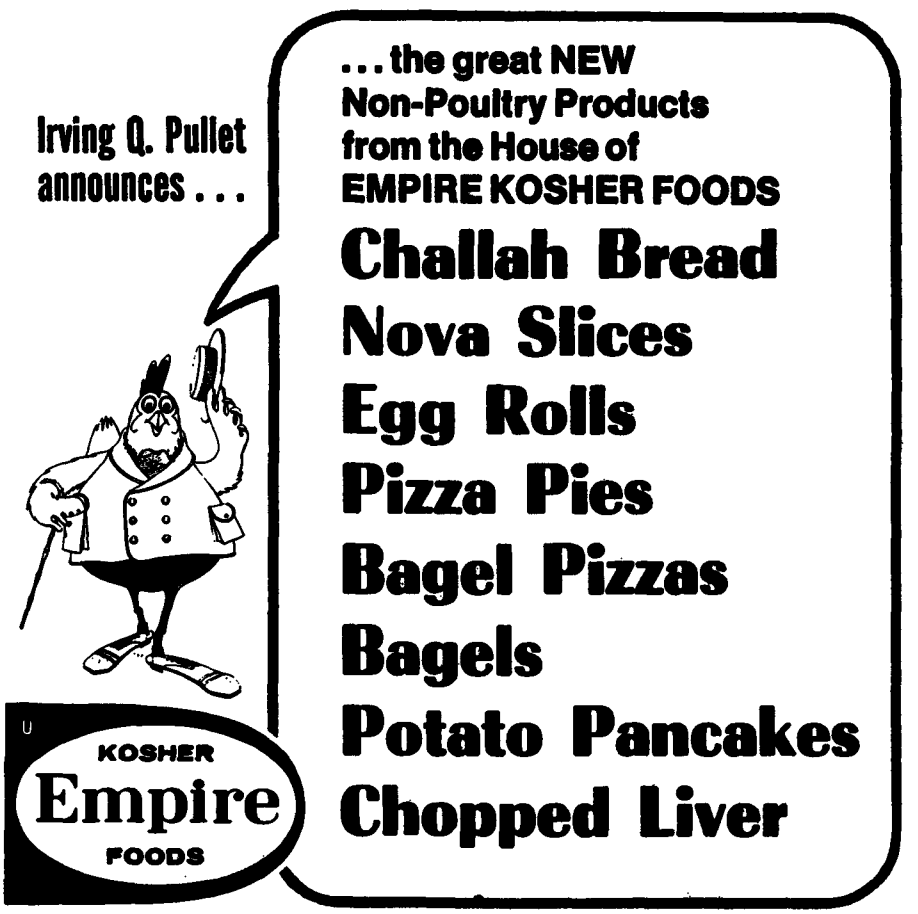
To this extent, I would join Berns in criticizing the Court's sense of past history, despite my own sympathies with Madison's separationist views.

CUSHING STROUT
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York

WILLIAM J. BENNETT writes:

I did not "show" that Madison's separationist views were "precisely what the First Amendment clauses originally meant" mainly because I did not argue that they were. My two points on this issue are: (1) that if the Court were to adopt Madison's position consistently it might relieve itself of burdens and difficult questions which the Constitution arguably does not require it to suffer, and (2) that pushing aside the view of Madison and Jefferson on the original understanding of this and other First Amendment matters strains Berns's argument.

In regard to the second, Cushing Strout has not refuted my claim that the view of Madison and Jefferson does not deserve to be pushed aside. My position requires me to show their view was an important ingredient in the final formulation of the First Amendment, and this is supported by the facts. Mr. Strout admits that the final formulation of the First Amendment was a compromise. Would he deny that it was a compromise that seriously took into account Madison's and Jefferson's view? I doubt it. Madison, after all, was the author of the original formulation of the Amendment and probably of the final version as well. Moreover, there are many scholars—Irving Brant and



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Leo Pfeffer among them—who believe, and can offer substantial evidence for their view, that the First Amendment as adopted represented a decisive victory for Madison's view.

Also beyond dispute is the early history of the Amendment. Jefferson used the important phrase, "building a wall of separation between church and state," in his Danbury letter ten years after the adoption of the Amendment, and he submitted this speech beforehand to his Attorney General for confirmation that this indeed was the law of the land. In 1811 Madison vetoed a grant of land to the Salem (Mississippi) Baptist Church on the ground that such a grant would "comprise a principle and precedent for the appropriation of funds of the United States for the use and support of religious societies, contrary to the article of the Constitution which declares that Congress shall make no law respecting a religious establishment." Did their persistence in these views represent a violent departure from the original understanding? In 1878 a unanimous Supreme Court, in *Reynolds* v. *U.S.*, speaking through Chief Justice Waite, quoted Jefferson's Danbury letter, and took it "as providing an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the Amendment."

Finally, Mr. Strout's argument that the First Amendment was formulated in such a way that "separation was also in some ways a linkage" and, therefore, that liberty and Christianity were seen to be close friends, is, I think, true, but it does not follow that because one is a friend of religion one is required to favor government support of religion. As Madison recognized, the questions are distinct. As he put it during the debates on the Virginia Assessment Bill, the issue is not "is religion necessary—but are religious establishments necessary for religion?"

Ambassador Morgenthau

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Barbara W. Tuchman's article, "The Assimilationist Dilemma: Ambassador Morgenthau's Story" [May], . . . omits more than can be justified by family ties. I was particularly distressed by the author's assertion that

> . . . the record suffers from a certain distortion—in that the dominant voice, as in every historical record, belongs to the victors, who in this case are the Zionists. Events proved them right with regard to the revival of Israel and the assimilationists wrong. Consequently, the former appear in the record as the disciples of truth and the latter as obstructionists, blind and selfish bitter-enders, objects of scorn and sometimes of malice. The malice and falsity of Felix Frankfurter's recollections of Morgenthau, published after the subject was safely dead, are a mean-spirited example.

Implied in the above statement are two serious accusations: first, that the Zionist movement, which Morgenthau opposed, has somehow denied him his rightful place in Jewish history; and second, that some Zionists, notably Felix Frankfurter, were mendacious in their accounts of Henry Morgenthau, Sr., and the events which he helped shape. Both of these claims ring hollow when one examines not only the memoirs and correspondence, but the official records, particularly the files of the U.S. State Department (by no stretch of the imagination a pro-Zionist source) surrounding the diplomatic activities of Henry Morgenthau, Sr., during the crucial years between 1917 and 1920. Some of the key events of this period involving Morgenthau and the Zionists, as well as Morgenthau and Eastern European Jewry, Barbara W. Tuchman wisely chose not to mention in her tongue-in-cheek euology of her grandfather, for they throw considerable light on the reasons he has never been considered an ethnic hero by the majority of Jews, in spite of his many good works and philanthropies.

Most memorable in this connection was the ill-fated Morgenthau mission of 1917, which involved a secret attempt to explore the possibility of detaching the Turkish empire from its alliance with the Central Powers. As a cover for this diplomatic mission, Morgenthau did not hesitate to use the desperate plight of Palestinian Jewry. Thus, he informed the New York *Times* that he was going to the Near East in order to investigate, and possibly to ameliorate, the condition of the Jews of Palestine and those living elsewhere in the Turkish realm.

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Why were they out to get him? Because he refused to join a local union. Sammy Kirkland's life has been altered, forever, because he refused to abandon his right to work to union goons.

Other lives have been changed too. Four of the union agents responsible for the vicious attack were given five-year jail sentences. Kirkland also filed a damage suit against the local and international unions.

In early 1976, union officials agreed to a $165,000 out-of-court settlement, one of the largest ever obtained in a union violence case. But as Kirkland's attorney provided by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation said, "No amount of money can compensate him for the damage that's been done."

Sammy Kirkland's case, shocking as it is, is not an isolated one. Herbert McGruther of Lake City, Fla., was fired from his construction job in 1975 because he refused to join another local of the same union.

McGruther was subjected to a different kind of intimidation. A union agent prominently displayed a large pistol in his belt while demanding that McGruther pay a union initiation fee and dues.

McGruther, with the support of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, has filed suit, charging the union with violating his rights and asking for punitive damages.

Sammy Kirkland and Herbert McGruther were fortunate. They found help. But how many other Kirklands and McGruthers in America need similar help?

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In order not to arouse the suspicions of the Zionists at home and abroad, Morgenthau connived with Secretary of State Robert Lansing to include a prominent American Zionist in the legation. The choice fell on Felix Frankfurter, who was at that time assistant to the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, a close associate of Justice Louis D. Brandeis, and the acknowledged leader of American Zionism.

Frankfurter was . . . nonplused by the appointment and attempted to resist it. He did not know Henry Morgenthau, Sr., and when he finally met the ex-ambassador, was puzzled by him. "He wasn't my kind of person," he would later write, "in the sense that his talk was inconsequential and not coherent, but loose and big and rhetorical . . ." As the mission progressed, Frankfurter's opinion of Morgenthau hardened, and he came to believe that the real purpose behind his assignment was to act as a kind of nursemaid to the ex-ambassador."...

Nor was Morgenthau viewed more favorably in European Zionist circles. When the news of the proposed mission reached England (June 1917), it alarmed Chaim Weizmann who saw it as a plot to undermine the Zionist national movement, since peace overtures toward Turkey, if successful, would leave little room for Zionist aspirations in Palestine. Already deeply involved in the negotiations which would culminate in the Balfour Declaration, Weizmann was also disturbed by Morgenthau's efforts to associate the American Zionist movement with his Turkish peace scheme and feared it might compromise his own negotiations.

Weizmann communicated these anxieties to various sympathetic English officials and was relieved to discover that the British government also opposed the Morgenthau mission, but did not dare to say so lest it alienate President Wilson. Seeking a way out of this political dilemma, the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, suggested to Weizmann that he act as an unofficial British representative and meet with Morgenthau at Gibraltar. As Weizmann would later recall his instructions from Balfour, ". . . he was to talk and keep talking till I had talked him out of the mission."

On July 4, 1917, as planned, a banquet in honor of Morgenthau was held in the fortress of Gibraltar. When the dinner was over, the British commander and his staff withdrew, leaving the American, British, and French representatives —Morgenthau, Weizmann, and a Colonel Weylalone. Weizmann . . . attempted to make Morgenthau recognize the futility of his mission. As the talks progressed, it became embarrassingly apparent to Weizmann that the ex-ambassador had no concrete plan . . . , but merely a vague notion that he could utilize his personal connections in Turkey to some end or other, and that he had not received any definite instructions from President Wilson. Finally, a day later, Morgenthau succumbed to Weizmann's arguments and agreed to abandon his mission. He grandly announced his intention of going to Biarritz instead of Egypt, there to await further instructions from President Wilson.

Soon after the Gibraltar meeting, on July 8, 1917, a full report of the proceedings was cabled by the Morgenthau mission from the American Embassy in Madrid to Secretary of State Robert Lansing. Composed mainly by Frankfurter, the cable was a masterpiece of ambiguity as it attempted to give reasons for the abandonment of the mission. Frankfurter, however, was far from relieved by the unexpected turn of events, for Morgenthau had informed him that he intended to participate next in a meeting called by the Allied Powers to discuss the Balkan situation. Alarmed, Frankfurter tried to persuade the ex-ambassador that he was not at liberty to represent President Wilson at this conference, not having specifically been asked to do so by either the President or the State Department. In an effort to prevent another fiasco, Frankfurter fired off a cable to the Undersecretary of State, Frank Polk, informing him of Morgenthau's plans and requesting that, ". . . they should somehow call Morgenthau home, get him away from Europe. . . ."

The subject of all this commotion blithely went his own way. He spent the greater portion of July and August in France, visited the French and British fronts, inspected American troops, attended numerous public ceremonies, and hobnobbed with various military personages. . . . In September 1917 Morgenthau returned to the United States to deliver a verbal report of his activities to President Wilson....

The collapse of the Morgenthau mission was of the utmost importance to Zionism and Jewry. It allowed England and France relentlessly to pursue their course of dismantling the Turkish empire (as had been agreed upon in the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty), and it removed for the Zionists what might have been a serious obstacle to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. It thus paved the way for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Following the collapse of his mission, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., became even more embittered toward Zionism. On December 12, 1917, he published a letter in the New York *Times* in which he flatly stated that Zionism was, ". . . a surrender, not a solution, of the Jewish question. . ." which might cost the Jews of America whatever they had gained in liberty and equality. And at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Morgenthau, at the head of an anti-Zionist delegation, carried his vendetta against Zionism even further by disavowing the Balfour Declaration.

Equally detrimental to Jewry was Henry Morgenthau's performance as head of a commission chosen to investigate the treatment of Jews in Poland after World War I. Convening from July through September 1919 at the invitation of the Polish premier, Ignace Paderewski, the Morgenthau commission traveled throughout Poland, visiting such places as Pinsk and Kielce where bloody pogroms had occurred. Not wishing to offend his hosts . . . he ignored the evidence of atrocities committed against the Jews and minimized the pogroms as isolated incidents. In the final report issued by the commission a great effort was made to justify the Poles. . . .

It is largely because of such incidents that Henry Morgenthau, Sr., has not been placed in the pantheon of Jewish greats, and not —as Barbara W. Tuchman suggests —because of Zionist versions of Jewish history or the malicious tone of Felix Frankfurter. . . .

JOSEPH ADLER
Forest Hills, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Barbara W. Tuchman has brought back to public view events of an earlier era of American Jewry which I believe are relevant to the current debate regarding the relationship of American Jewry to Israel.

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As Mrs. Tuchman points out, "The German-Jewish leaders in America gave the support without which there would have been no living settlement to incorporate into statehood." She then speaks of the cooperation among Louis Marshall and other "establishment" leaders and Chaim Weizmann in creating the Jewish Agency. Since it is not the central theme of her article, Mrs. Tuchman passes over this point rather quickly. In fact, the total story of the negotiations leading to the establishment of the Jewish Agency for Palestine reveals that the eight-year delay in its formation was due in great part to the Zionist Organization's insistence that the American Jewish establishment limit its role in the Zionist cause to providing funds. The American Jews were told to leave the decisions regarding the economic and political development of Jewish Palestine to the Zionists.

An example of this is the story of the Palestine Economic Corporation founded in 1924 by Marshall, Bernard Flexner, and Felix Warburg. Weizmann and the American Zionist leaders initially gave their tacit support to this project; after its formation, however, the new organization met the active opposition of Weizmann's chief American lieutenant, Louis Lipsky, then President of the ZOA, and of the Zionist Organization's Palestine offices. . . . The elimination of Justice Louis Brandeis and his followers from the power structure of the Zionist Organization in 1921 is another example of this same approach.

Today, many articles on . . . the economic crisis in Israel speak of the structural inefficiency of the Israeli economy. As a rabbi and student of Jewish history, I claim ignorance in matters of economic policy. However, many of the complaints brought forth today are parallel to the critiques voiced first by Brandeis and echoed later by Flexner and Warburg. The response seems to be the same today as it was then. American Jews should send money, give political support, but keep their criticisms to themselves. And those who dare to criticize establishment policy are branded . . . as anti-Zionists. . . .

[Rabbi] NEAL I. BOROVITZ
Austin, Texas

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

We were very pleased to see Barbara W. Tuchman's article, based on a paper read at the American Historical Association-American Jewish Historical Society joint meeting held on December 28, 1976.

However, we regret that the identifying note did not include mention of our participation with the AHA, particularly since such a citation was included in the article by Eugene V. Rostow ["The American Stake in Israel"], which you published in the April COMMENTARY. Mrs. Tuchman and Professor Rostow appeared on the same program.

BERNARD WAX
American Jewish Historical Society
Waltham, Massachusetts

Barbara W. Tuchman writes:

With regard to the letter from Joseph Adler, I think he would have been wiser to have confined his remarks to what was stated in my article, rather than to what he thinks is "implied." I neither stated nor implied, nor do I think, that the Zionist movement "denied [Morgenthau] his rightful place in Jewish history." I believe his place, small but distinct, belongs in American history and is not subject to denial or affirmation by Zionists.

I stand by what I wrote about Felix Frankfurter. Those who knew him as a person, as distinct from the myth, will acknowledge that when it suited his purposes he could be a character-assassin of a most accomplished kind.

I myself believe that the Zionists were right in their formulation of the Jewish destiny, that is, in the necessity of statehood in Palestine. The subject of my article, however (to which Mr. Adler does not address himself), was the idea and historical context of assimilation in the U.S.—as exemplified in the person of Henry Morgenthau, Sr.—and, further, to set the record a little bit straighter by pointing out that the assimilationists did far more to support the Jewish colony in Palestine than the Zionists have ever acknowledged; that indeed, but for that support, the *yishuv* might not have survived to become a state.

Unhappily any attempt, even so modest as this one of mine, to adjust the record instantly arouses all the old Zionist vituperation which, though understandable in the years when they were inferior in worldly position to the assimilationists, was always destructive, and is by now obsolete and tiresome. For Mr. Adler to state, for example, that I wrote "tongue-in-cheek"—that is to say, facetiously—about a person whom I loved and admired very much and who was an important influence in my life, is both absurd and insulting.

The function of a historian is not polemics but understanding—which brings me to Mr. Adler's highly colored version of the Morgenthau mission of 1917, full of such loaded phrases as "connived with Lansing," "grandly announced," "blithely went his way," "hobnobbed with . . . ." I do not know what Mr. Adler's credentials are in this field, but I would advise the interested reader to look elsewhere for the facts. They have been fully and accurately presented in Howard M. Sachar's *History of Israel* (Knopf, 1976) and in Isaiah Friedman's *The Question of Palestine, 1914-18* (Schocken, 1973), based on a thorough and scholarly examination of recently opened British as well as other archives.

I will not attempt to condense this complicated episode in these few columns, except to point out that the mission was not some flighty notion dreamed up by Morgenthau, as Mr. Adler, taking his cue from Frankfurter, pretends, but an official attempt, *assigned* to Morgenthau by the President and State Department, to detach Turkey and possibly shorten the war. "Washington was convinced," Professor Sachar states, "that such a possibility might be usefully explored with Morgenthau's 'reliable' Ottoman sources. In May 1917, therefore, the State Department requested the former Ambassador . . . to embark upon negotiation with certain 'intermediaries' in Switzerland. . . ." The subsequent events may be consulted in the works I have cited and also, more briefly, in Walter Laqueur's *A History of Zionism* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972).

I regret that all this space and readers' attention have had to be given over to a communication that adds more mud than light to the subject it discusses.

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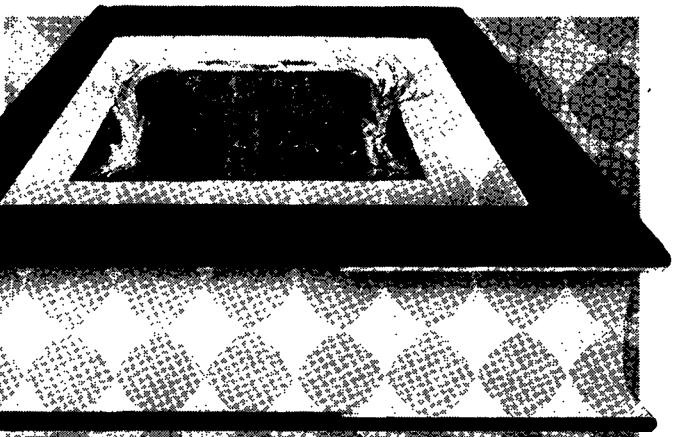

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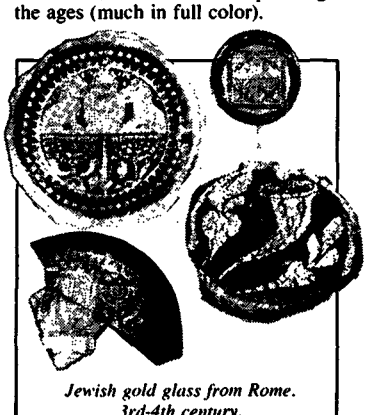

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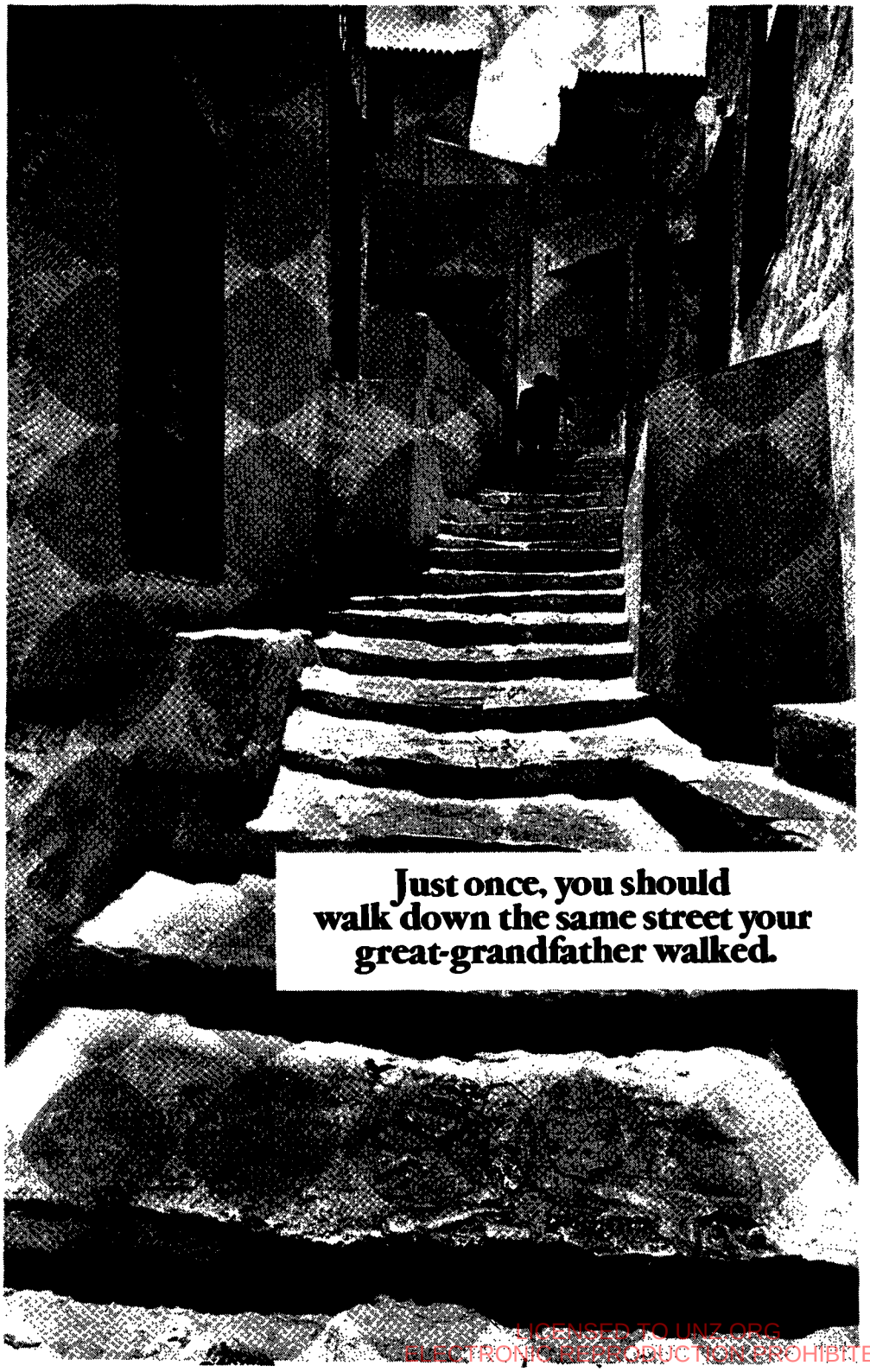

Picture this if you will.

A man who's spent all his life in the United States gets on a plane, crosses a great ocean, lands.

He walks the same streets his family walked centuries ago.

He sees his name, which is rare in America, filling three pages in a phone book.

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the Soviet Union. They were promptly accused of Nazi connections and branded as *racist*. Jews escaped this treatment until the Six-Day War of 1967. That event, however, aroused sufficient pro-Israel, pro-Jewish sentiment within the Soviet Union to evoke the by now almost bureaucratic response. Bernard Lewis writes:

> The results were immediately visible in a vehement campaign of abuse, particularly in the attempt to equate the Israelis with the Nazis as aggressors, invaders, occupiers, racists, oppressors, and murderers.

Within a short period of time, and coincidentally with the introduction of "racist" into currency as a general term of abuse, Soviet propagandists began to equate Zionism *per se* with racism. In a statement released to the press on March 4, 1970, a "group of Soviet citizens of Jewish nationality"—making use of the facilities of the Soviet foreign ministry—attacked "the aggression of the Israeli ruling circles," and said that "Zionism has always expressed the chauvinistic views and *racist* [my emphasis] ravings of the Jewish bourgeoisie." This may well be the first official Soviet reference to Zionism as racism in the fashionable connotation of the term.

STEADILY AND predictably, these charges moved into international forums. In 1973 Israel was excluded from the regional bodies of UNESCO. In 1974 the International Labor Conference adopted a "Resolution Concerning the Policy of Discrimination, Racism, and Violation of Trade Union Freedoms and Rights Practiced by the Israeli Authorities in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories." The charge of racism was now pressed. In June 1975 it appeared at the Mexico City Conference of the International Women's Year.

One must be present on those occasions to sense their intensity and their implications. It happens that the British critic Goronwy Rees was present at the moment the Third Committee of the General Assembly adopted the Zionism resolution. This is how it struck him:

> There were ghosts haunting the Third Committee that day; the ghosts of Hitler and Goebbels and Julius Streicher, grinning with delight to hear, not only Israel, but Jews as such denounced in language which would have provoked hysterical applause at any Nuremberg rally. . . . And there were other ghosts also at the debate: the ghosts of the 6,000,000 dead in Dachau and Sachsenhausen and other extermination camps, listening to the same voices which had cheered and jeered and abused them as they made their way to the gas chambers. For the fundamental thesis advanced by the supporters of the resolution, and approved by the majority of the Third Committee, was that to be a Jew, and to be proud of it, and to be determined to preserve the right to be a Jew, is to be an enemy of the human race.

Rees was right: evil was loose in that chamber on that day. And it is still abroad in the world. The Zionism resolution was adopted by the General Assembly in November 1975. The following February, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights found Israel guilty of "war crimes" in the occupied Arab territories. The counts read as if they could have come from the Nuremberg verdicts:

annexation of parts of the occupied territories
destruction and demolition
confiscation and expropriation
evacuation, deportation, expulsion, displacement and transfer of inhabitants
mass arrests, administrative detention, and ill-treatment
pillaging of archaeological and cultural property
interference with religious freedoms and affront to humanity.

In April 1976, in the Security Council, a representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization spoke of the "Pretoria-Tel Aviv Axis," making an explicit reference to the "axis" between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in the 1930's. In May, in the same body, the Soviet Union accused Israel of "racial genocide" in putting down unrest on the occupied West Bank of the Jordan River. The same month, in a General Assembly committee, a PLO document likened Israeli measures to Nazi atrocities during World War II:

> The sealing of a part of the city of Nablus is a violation of the basic human rights . . . reminiscent of the ghettos and concentration camps erected by the Hitlerites. . . .

That the purpose of all this was to delegitimize Israel in the interest of its Arab enemies was of course obvious to everyone. What should have been equally obvious was that the assault on Israel—the most vulnerable of the democracies—served a more generalized effort to deprive the democratic nations of their legitimacy as democracies. Salami tactics, as the Communists used to say—first one small unit of the democratic world, then the next. For in true Orwellian fashion, the free societies in the world were under attack precisely and paradoxically for *not* being free. *They were attacked for violating human rights.* The charge could range from genocide to unemployment, but it always followed the Orwellian principle: hit the democracies in the one area where they have the strongest case to make against the dictatorships.

Representatives of the Soviet Union and other Communist countries are not especially adept at this. But in a diplomatic maneuver which foreshadowed the military strategy of using Cuban troops as surrogates, they could sit back and allow most of the talking to be done by spokesmen from the Third World, some of whom were very good indeed at the Orwellian game. Of course, just as the Arabs had their own good reasons for attacking Israel, quite apart from any benefit to the Soviet

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Union, so these Third World regimes had their own good reasons for attacking democracy. With a handful of exceptions, the fourscore new nations which have come into the world in the last twenty-five years or so began their existence as constitutional democracies. By now the vast majority have succumbed to dictators and strongmen of one kind or another for whom the opportunity to attack any countries which *have* remained faithful to their constitutional vows is—to put it mildly—compelling.

Western policy has never seen the new nations in this light. For one thing, there was the tremendous investment of hope in what we saw as the small seedlings of our various great oaks and a corresponding reluctance to think, much less speak, ill of them. Then there was the trauma of Vietnam, which perhaps made it seem even more necessary that we should be approved by nations so very like the one we were despoiling. In consequence we were as thrown by these onslaughts from the Third World as we were when the Russians came up with the Cuban army as an extension of the same school of diplomacy. When in 1975 the Conference of the International Women's Year resolved that Zionism is a form of racism, the senior American diplomat present cabled Washington: "ALL ESSENTIAL AMERICAN OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED." If American diplomats could fail to recognize so egregious an attack on our own position, and were even unable to recognize that the attack had succeeded, is it any wonder that they were altogether incapable of understanding its general political significance?

THEN, suddenly, everything changed. It would be hard to establish just why, but a useful axiom is that of Michael Polanyi: People change their minds. They wake up one day to find they no longer think as they did. Something like this happened in the case of human rights. One could see the evidence, for example, in the drafting committee for the 1976 Democratic platform. Sam Brown, representing what might be termed the McGovernite forces in the party, introduced a resolution demanding that all American military aid be cut off to regimes that did not respect human rights. Brown's resolution was directed against authoritarian regimes of the Right and was in the spirit of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 which called on the President to "request the government of Chile to protect the human rights of all individuals." I thereupon spoke for what might be called the Jackson forces in the party. The Jackson amendment to the Trade Act of 1974 was directed against certain policies of the same administration which in effect supported dictatorships of the Left. "To assure the continued dedication of the United States to the fundamental human rights," declared the amendment, no credits were to be extended to non-market economies which denied their citizens the right to emigrate on reasonable terms.

The Brown proposal, we suggested, was too much a convenience for those nations which get their hardware from Czechoslovakia, and want their soft loans from the United States. Why not oppose any form of aid? "We'll be against the dictators you don't like the most," I said across the table to Brown, "if you'll be against the dictators we don't like the most." The result was the strongest platform commitment to human rights in our history. Whether or not it was this commitment which directly influenced the new President to take the offensive on human rights, he began doing so from the very first, in his inaugural address.

The problem now is to sustain the initiative. For not everyone in America—or at any rate in the American government—has changed his mind. The President, unavoidably, is getting the same advice that led to the passivity of his immediate predecessors. The State Department is uneasy about Soviet anger. The cult of the Third World is, if anything, greater now than ever. It is entirely possible the whole initiative will come to nothing if we do not establish a sufficiently firm conceptual base to sustain the inevitable tremor and shock.

FOUR principles come to mind on which to construct such a base.

First principle: *International law and treaty obligations are wholly on our side.* That for so long a period we appear to have forgotten this gave an inestimable advantage to the totalitarians. The Soviet reaction to the signs that our memories are stirring has been angry. But this "surprising adverse reaction to our stand on human rights," as the President recently characterized it, will get worse, not better—they would be fools to respond in any other way. The more then should we know and understand that the law is on our side.

The United Nations Charter imposes two obligations on members. The first, which is well-known, is to be law-abiding in their relations with other nations: not to attack them, not to subvert them, and so on. But there is a second obligation, which very simply is to be law-abiding in the treatment of one's own citizens. The United Nations Charter requires that members govern themselves on liberal principles, as these principles have evolved and are understood in the Western democracies.

Improbable as this may sound, it happens nonetheless to be true. The Charter, in the main, was drafted by British and American constitutional lawyers. The Preamble speaks of "fundamental human rights," of "the dignity and worth of the human person," of "the equal rights of men and women." Article 1 enjoins the members to promote through the UN

> respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

The meaning of these words, as lawyers say, is en-

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tirely discoverable. They mean just what any of us in the Western democracies would assume they mean.

The Russians knew what they were signing. We do well to remember that they began World War II as allies of Nazi Germany, partners in the conquest and partition of Poland. They had a true pro-Nazi past to overcome. In the early days of the United Nations they sought to do this by taking the lead in asserting that members had to be—liberal states! In the first year of the new organization, the question arose as to whether Spain should be admitted to membership. Absolutely not, said Andrei Gromyko in the Security Council: to the contrary, punitive measures should be taken against Spain. Then in December 1946, on the initiative of Poland, the General Assembly adopted a resolution directed to Spain providing that

> . . . if within a reasonable time there is not established a government which derives its authority from the consent of the governed, committed to respect freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, and to the prompt holding of an election in which the Spanish people, free from force and intimidation and regardless of party, may express their will, the Security Council consider the adequate measures to be taken in order to remedy the situation.

Poland and all the Communist members voted in the affirmative. (Spain was not admitted until 1955.)

Today there is not one member of the United Nations in five which can meet the standard of the Polish resolution. And yet it is those very nations who go about attacking members who do maintain those standards. There is a term for this: the big lie. But clearly, as we have been seeing, a counterattack can be devastating.

THIS brings us to the second principle: *Human rights is a political component of American foreign policy, not a humanitarian program.* It is entirely correct to say (as was repeatedly said during all those "years of silence" in Washington) that quiet diplomacy is much the more effective way to obtain near-term concessions from totalitarian regimes with respect to particular individuals who seek our help. But the large result of proceeding in this fashion is that the democracies accommodate to the dictators. Concepts of human rights should be as integral to American foreign policy as is Marxist-Leninism to Soviet or Chinese or Yugoslav operations and planning. Yet it seems clear that this is not what the career officers in the State Department who make up the permanent government wish to see, and the signs already suggest that the Secretary of State is not resisting the permanent government.

At Law Day ceremonies on April 30, Cyrus R. Vance delivered his first public address since becoming Secretary of State, and chose for his subject "Human Rights and Foreign Policy." "Our human-rights policy," he said, "must be understood in order to be effective." He would "set forth the substance of that policy, and the results we hope to achieve."

This effort was surely in order, for the policy was still singularly unformed. The President's single sentence in his inaugural address—"Because we are free we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere"—had led to press speculation, then queries, then to a sequence of presidential acts— e.g., the letter to Andrei Sakharov, the meeting with the Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky, and partial statements such as those in the address at the United Nations on March 17—but still nothing that could be described as a policy. The impression was that of a President responding at successively higher levels of commitment to successively greater levels of approval, but with no very clear notions of where it would all come out. There is nothing much the matter with this in a democracy. But there comes a time when the agents of policy must be told *what to do.* This is a Secretary's task, and Vance undertook to perform it.

The result, it must be stated, bodes disaster. The Secretary's speech missed the whole point. For the entire thrust of his speech was to assert that human rights is not a political issue but rather a humanitarian aid program, a special kind of international social work. After rousing the rage of the Muscovite and the scorn of Latin American grandees, after stirring the timorousness of European allies and inducing something between anxiety and fear in smaller capitals around the world, it turned out that all we really intended was to be of help to individuals.

Freud's remark that anatomy is destiny has been used to suggest the importance of organization in government. The Ford administration established a "Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs" in the office of the Secretary of State. The Coordinator had three deputies: "Refugee and Migration Affairs," "Prisoners of War and Missing-in-Action," and "Human Rights." To reflect the greater salience which these issues are now to have, the Carter administration has asked Congress to make the Coordinator an Assistant Secretary. However, in the past, when this kind of change has been made, it has in fact signaled that the Secretary of State was no longer that much interested in the issue involved, and was turning it over to the bureaucracy. Thus, only a few years ago, coordinators or special assistants for environmental affairs and population matters were to be found in the Secretary's office. But with the fading of those issues, they were turned over to the office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental and Population Affairs, reporting to the Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. Secretary Vance may not intend to relegate human rights to the destiny of departmental routine, but in organizational terms, this is what he has done.

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Rounding out the pattern of a depoliticized conception of human rights, the Secretary in his speech announced:

> We are expanding the program of the Agency for International Development for "New Initiatives in Human Rights" as a complement to present efforts to get the benefits of our aid to those most in need abroad.

He added that the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs would also be involved. He declared our efforts would "range from quiet diplomacy . . . through public pronouncements, to withholding of assistance." We would meet at Belgrade in June to review the Helsinki accords and "to work for progress there on important human issues: family reunification, binational marriages. . . ." He mentioned "that many [*sic*] nations of the world are organized on authoritarian rather than democratic principles." He did not mention totalitarian governments. Nor might he, so long as the foreign service has its way. If the foreign service prevails, the Secretary of State will soothe the Soviet Union and only challenge Ecuador.

CAN one already detect this influence not only in the Secretary's statements but even in the President's own more recent words? Only weeks ago, expressing his surprise at the "adverse reaction in the Soviet Union to our stand on human rights," Mr. Carter said: "We have never singled them out. I think I have been quite reticent in trying to publicly condemn the Soviets. I have never said anything except complimentary things about Mr. Brezhnev, for instance." But the Soviets are *necessarily* singled out by any serious human-rights offensive—and they know it. They are singled out by the force of their arms: they are the most powerful opponents of liberty on earth today. And they are singled out by the force of their ideology which, since the passing of Nazism and the eclipse of fascism as a school of political thought (Franco Spain having been its last paltry bastion), remains the only major political doctrine that challenges human rights *in principle*. When the authoritarian regimes of the Right violate human rights nowadays, they generally do so not in the name of a different political creed but in the name of national security. They must torture, they say, to uproot guerrillas and terrorists; or they must keep political prisoners to protect themselves against armed subversion from without and within. Unlike the Soviets and their ideological progeny in other countries ruled by Marxist-Leninist regimes, these right-wing regimes do not deride liberty as a "bourgeois" illusion. They commit abominations in practice; the Communist countries commit abominations on principle. Anyone who cares about human rights will know what type of abomination is the more destructive of those rights.

According to a presidential aide quoted by the New York *Times*, the President's human-rights initiative, among other things, has alarmed the Soviet leadership. The Soviets had "viewed the United States under the Ford and Nixon administrations . . . as running a kind of defensive, rear-guard foreign policy of retreat. . . . Mr. Carter and his advisers feel the Soviet leaders have been dismayed by the thought that their concept of the decline of the West might no longer be valid."* If the human-rights initiative turns out to be serious, the Soviets will have good cause to be dismayed at the stirring of a new American will to resist the advance of totalitarianism.

But here again, the permanent government can be expected to push in exactly the opposite direction—toward a policy of reassurance and accommodation. Indeed it already has, and with some success, to judge by the President's commencement address at Notre Dame, the first and still most comprehensive statement of the foreign policy of his new administration. The President begins in this speech by reaffirming "America's commitment to human rights as a fundamental tenet of our foreign policy." But when he goes on to explain what this commitment requires of us, he suddenly changes the subject:

> Abraham Lincoln said that our nation could not exist half-slave and half-free. We know that a peaceful world cannot long exist one-third rich and two-thirds hungry.

This is a most startling and extraordinary transition. The first sentence reminds us, truly, that the world today *is* half-slave and half-free. Out of four billion persons, something approaching a billion-and-a-half live in totalitarian Marxist states. We have come to think of this opposition as the East-West conflict. But then, having thus reminded us of it, the President immediately directs our concern away from this conflict to quite a different matter, that of relations between the industrial North and the developing South. He even calls on the Soviets, as part of the former group, to join in "common aid efforts" to help the latter (although the Soviets accept no responsibility whatever for the plight of the developing world: in their unwavering view it is all our fault).

The implication seems clear: we are to divert our attention from the central political struggle of our time—that between liberal democracy and

* June 26, 1977. The *Times* may not have known it, but it was onto a government secret here of possibly more interest than the Pentagon Papers. In the first half of the 1970's the Democratic opposition generally attacked the foreign policy of the Nixon-Kissinger-Ford era as aggressive, risk-taking, and sometimes mindlessly anti-Communist. In truth, within the Republican administration itself, and at least within the more sophisticated circles of the Democratic opposition, it was understood that, to the contrary, what was going on was precisely a "kind of defensive, rear-guard foreign policy of retreat. . . ." Moreover, it was understood that the Russians understood it this way.

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totalitarian Communism—and focus instead on something else. We can do this, says the President, because we are now "free" of the "inordinate fear of Communism" which led us at times to abandon our values for the values of the totalitarians. But was our fear of Communism "inordinate"? And is there nothing to fear from Communism today? Does the President mean to suggest that the military and ideological competition we face from the Soviet Union has declined? If so, why have the Soviets engaged in a massive military build-up? And why do they continue and even intensify their ideological offensive against the West?

Whatever his answer to these questions, the President does state explicitly that it was our "inordinate fear of Communism" which led us to the "intellectual and moral poverty" of the war in Vietnam. This causal connection can also be challenged. Some of us said at the time that the enterprise was doomed, because it was misconceived and mismanaged. Are we to say now—in this, echoing what our enemies say of us—that it was also wrong or immoral to wish to resist the advance of totalitarian Communism?

THIS BRINGS us to the third principle: *Human rights has nothing to do with our innocence or guilt as a civilization. It has to do with our survival.* The President has staffed the Department of State and the Department of Defense with curiously opposite groups of persons who have attracted each other in a not wholly reassuring way. Put plainly, the leading foreign-policy and defense-policy officials of the administration are men who made their reputations running the war in Vietnam. The second echelon of officials made its reputation by opposing that war. There is something troubling in this cross-generational relationship. Put plainly once again, the top echelon seems to be seeking absolution from its juniors for what the President himself now calls the "moral and intellectual poverty" of its ideas in the past.

Of the Secretary of State, Hedrick Smith, chief of the New York *Times* Washington bureau, has reported:

> With the hindsight of history, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, who as Deputy Secretary of Defense played a major role in the American build-up in Vietnam, has publicly said that he now feels that "it was a mistake to intervene in Vietnam." And those who know him well say that the Vietnam war is the single most important experience in shaping this current outlook.

One does not ask of the Secretary that he not be influenced by that experience: only that he be thoughtful about it. (At the University of Georgia Law School, where he spoke on Law Day, he shared the platform with Dean Rusk, a Secretary of State who came to office preoccupied with "the loss of China"—the opposite experience.) The Vietnam war was a mistake because we could not successfully halt a totalitarian advance there—not at costs acceptable to a liberal society. But it did not end the expansion of totalitarianism, nor yet the need to resist. If anything, it added enormously to the importance of ideological resistance, and this precisely is the role of "Human Rights in Foreign Policy."

Guilt as a political weapon is but little understood. Still, it should be evident that it is used quite effectively within the United States and against the United States. Some years back Nathan Glazer observed that the political rhetoric of our age was capable of depicting a prosperous and tolerant and reasonably creative society such as our own as utterly detestable—and could persuade many of those best off in this society that this is exactly the case. In 1977 an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court declared in an opinion handed down from that bench that it were better never to be born than to be born an American and go to "second-rate" schools.

The President—any President—will face particularly subtle variations on the theme of guilt, a worldly, ex-ambassadorial, Council-on-Foreign-Relations concern that we Americans are such inveterate moralizers. Washington is awash with former cold warriors (they were only *giving* orders) who, having failed so miserably in their monstrously misconceived adventure in Vietnam, have decided that the country really is hopeless, that it has no capacity to resist the advance of totalitarianism, and that the best thing to do is to accommodate and to appease.

There is no way to deal with this save to raise it to the level of awareness, and to repudiate it. Human rights is a weapon in the struggle for the survival of the nation—a nation partly right and partly wrong, as it ever has been and doubtless ever will be. That we have a right and a duty to survive ought to be too obvious to need saying explicitly. That it is not obvious to our political culture is a measure of how savagely our guilt is turned against us.

GUILT has among other things paralyzed us in our relations with the developing world—and this leads to the fourth principle of a sound human-rights policy: *The new nations must be made to understand that our commitment to them depends on their ceasing to be agents of the totalitarian attack on democracy.*

Only a handful of these nations are Soviet satellites. But a Marxist might well say that time and again they *objectively* support the Soviet cause. The concept of objective political behavior is, of course, a favorite debating device of Marxists. Thus, Lucio Lombardo Radice, a leading member of the Central Committee of the Italian Communist party, recently explained in an interview in *Encounter* how Stalin in the 1930's realized the dangers of Nazism and ceased attacking Western

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Social Democrats. "In the situation existing at the time, Stalin was, objectively speaking, supporting the struggle for freedom, democracy, and peace." The time has come to explain to the representatives of a great many nations for which on other grounds we have a good deal of sympathy that, "objectively speaking," they are supporting anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, and war.

An example was on display this past June at the International Labor Conference in Geneva. The American labor movement is one of the few groups to have sensed early on the drift of world events and Soviet tactics. In 1974, after the International Labor Organization passed a resolution denouncing Israel for racism, the labor movement, supported by the business community, asked that the United States give notice that we would withdraw if such intrusions of anti-democratic politics into the proceedings of ILO did not stop.

The ILO charter requires a two-year notice of intent to withdraw, and this was given in the fall of 1975. The letter made clear that the United States did not want to withdraw. We, after all, had helped to found the ILO at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. We had joined it when we never joined any other of the League organizations. We have provided the great share of its funds, and it was we who helped turn its attention to the problems of developing nations which now almost exclusively concern it. All we asked was that it stay out of international politics of the kind associated with foul-mouthed excoriations of Israel. This position was characterized by *Trud*, the Soviet labor paper, as a demand by "reactionary circles, and primarily the U.S. delegation . . . to exclude . . . political questions connected with the people's struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialism, and racism."

We got our answer on June 3. "Using a procedural device," the New York *Times* reported, "the Communist and Third World countries blocked action on an American-inspired proposal that the assembly's rules be amended to screen out politically motivated resolutions." With a handful of exceptions, the Third World sided with the Communist world against the democratic world.

On June 22, the Secretary of Labor, Ray Marshall, told a press conference that the United States will now likely leave the International Labor Organization. It is a little heartbreaking to those who have cared much about this organization which once seemed to hold such promise. But why did it happen? Because the Third World *objectively* chose to back Communism against democracy. *They* know this. And they will make a distinct judgment about which way the world is headed depending on whether we make clear to them that we know it.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL puts the case at the most extreme in his new book, *The Totalitarian Temptation*.* He describes a world struggle between a truly revolutionary democratic model of society (to give Secretary Vance his due, he did quote Archibald MacLeish: "The cause of human liberty is now the one great revolutionary cause") and a "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist model, with all its little brothers," implementing a brand of totalitarian socialism which Revel calls "unofficial Stalinism." These, Revel writes, are the real reactionaries, but in his view they are winning, because more and more the world finds such regimes to be more attractive:

> Therefore . . . the new American revolution, or the new world revolution that started in America, will probably fail—not because of the United States but because the world steadily rejects democracy.

This is the "worst case," and there are those who are resigned to it and appear already to have made their peace with it. Thus, George Kennan in his new book, *The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy*, asserts that democracy is a North Atlantic phenomenon, and in no way a "natural form of rule for people outside those narrow perimeters." It were folly and worse, he maintains, to go about correcting and improving "the political habits of large parts of the world's population."

This is an arguable point—does it not display a lofty disdain for what is after all a well-documented and universal human aspiration, namely, the desire to be free? But my point is a different one. I believe that Mr. Kennan underestimates the impact *on the democracies* of the totalitarian attack (for example: more than half a dozen *British* universities are now banning Jewish spokesmen from their campuses on the ground that Zionism is a form of racism). Most of the world is not free, and what we can do about that is problematic. But surely we can do something—surely we should do everything—to preserve that part of the world which *is* free. The point, Revel's point, in putting the case at its worst is not to become resigned to the present state of affairs but to elicit countermeasures that will prevent the worst case from coming true. And it is here that the issue of human rights becomes essential.

For the moment our first task is our own defense. An implacable, forceful, and unvarying counter-attack—"castigating mercilessly the prevailing mendacity," as Walter Laqueur puts it†—whenever the issue of human rights and the nature of our respective societies is raised by our adversaries or their objective allies could yet save the democratic world from "Finlandization from within." Human rights is the single greatest weapon we have left for the defense of liberty. It would be calamitous if we allowed ourselves to be robbed of it by the voices of fear and guilt, inside the government or out.

* See the review by Stephen Haseler on page 79 of this issue.—ED.

† "The Issue of Human Rights," COMMENTARY, May 1977.

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On Being Blocked & Other Literary Matters

An Interview

Henry Roth

HENRY ROTH's *1934 novel,* Call It Sleep, *which the English critic Walter Allen called one of "the great achievements of American writing in this century," was reprinted in 1960 and appeared in a best-selling paperback edition four years later. After writing his story of a boy growing up in an immigrant Jewish family, Roth wrote no other book. There were rumors about his activities, but he remained silent and gave few interviews.*

Henry Roth and his wife live in a trailer in northwest Albuquerque. They came to New Mexico in 1968 when he received a fellowship to the D. H. Lawrence ranch in Taos. The Roths are retired, although Muriel Roth still arranges music and accompanies on the piano. Both are active in the intellectual and cultural activities of the Jewish community in Albuquerque. Henry Roth is about five feet, seven inches tall and bears a strong resemblance to David Ben-Gurion.

This interview was conducted by JOHN S. FRIEDMAN, *a former senior editor at the* Denver Magazine *who now works for the Community Services Administration in Washington.*

Interviewer: I would like to start with some background information. What were your early experiences, and what led you to write *Call It Sleep*?

Roth: The book's locale is the East Side of New York City, which was a decidedly homogeneous Jewish section in those years. Now, in 1914, just prior to World War I, that first great catastrophe of modern times, my parents moved from the East Side to Harlem because my mother wanted to be near her newly-arrived kinfolk. I was then eight. My father always fitted his dreams into actions that were taken on other grounds. He would then fit his current delusions into them—something like a hermit crab—he thought that he might be able to go directly to the milk shed on the West Side of Manhattan where the freight cars came in with bulk milk, and buy milk directly from the wholesalers who were purveying it there, and start a milk route of his own.

Interviewer: Where did your parents come from?

Roth: They came from Galicia, an area or province in what was then the Austro-Hungarian empire under the Emperor Franz-Joseph.

Interviewer: Did you come over with your mother as a small child?

Roth: I was born in Galicia, the same place that my mother and father were born.

Interviewer: Where in Galicia?

Roth: I was born in my father's town called Tismenicz, near Stryj, in the Carpatho-Ukraine. My mother went to live with my father's family when he left Galicia and came here. By the way, have you read *World of Our Fathers*?

Interviewer: Parts of it.

Roth: Well, we followed the classic pattern of immigration, in which the husband came over first and accumulated enough money to send for the rest of the family. My father came here first and later sent for my mother and me. Here's another thing; afterward, there developed a confusion about my age at arrival, because my mother insisted that I was only eighteen months old. My father said I was over two years old.

Interviewer: So, you moved to Harlem when you were eight. How did that differ from the Lower East Side?

Roth: When we moved to Harlem, we moved to the fringe of what was then Little Italy, which was all right—to live with Italians is okay. We moved to East Harlem, east of Park Avenue on 119th Street. I don't know if you're familiar with that area or not. The train, the Grand Central train, climbs out of the tunnel at 96th Street, enters the trestle at 111th, and we lived just east of the trestle on 119th. The neighborhood was the last residue, or vestige, if that is the right word, of the Irish population in Harlem. The Irish at that time were the ethnic minority on the make. They were the ones who were the most upwardly mobile, and they were the dominant group in Har-

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lem. They were the best prizefighters, the best baseball players, the best of everything; in fact, my mother, who had very little English at her command, would try to imitate some neighbor, saying, for example, that Mayor Walker was Eyereesh. I could just barely understand her, her Yiddish dialect compounded with an imitation brogue, you can imagine.

The Irish were very tough. If you fought, excelled at fisticuffs, okay. But I felt outnumbered and defeated from the start. The Irish are confrontational. You have to confront an Irishman. If he has a difference of opinion, it's strongly put, and you either have to fight about it, or answer in just as crisp and vehement terms. I retreated into myself and became an ingratiating kind of person in order to get along, which was a very bad thing for a kid at that age.

Interviewer: Was there anti-Semitism?

Roth: Oh, there was lots of anti-Semitism. It was taken for granted. Every other word was Jew bastard.

Interviewer: Coming from the Italians as well as the Irish?

Roth: No, the Italians were easier for some reason or other. I don't know if it was their Latin temperament or their native tolerance or simply their lower status as immigrants. They also had to learn to speak English in common with other foreign-born, the Irish did not. I thought all Irish were anti-Semites, and it wasn't until I made my first acquaintance with modern literature, and lo and behold, discovered that there were Irish men and Irish women who were just as sensitive and as gentle as I was, or thought I was. It was in the literature that I discovered the wonderful tenderness and sensitivity of the Irish: Yeats, Shaw, Synge, O'Casey, and Joyce. But until then, you had no chance to know it, because if you're a kid, and especially if you're a poor ballplayer and if you're poor at sports in general, you really get it. Sports weren't encouraged on the East Side. The only way you could have won respect from the Irish would have been to trounce them soundly, and I couldn't.

On the East Side, I think I was aggressive enough, but once we came into Harlem, I suffered a serious loss of morale. And why were we in this very fringe of Harlem, of Jewish Harlem? My father being what he is, again, in order to save a few bucks, because it would have amounted to very little—the rent was $12 a month for this cold-water railroad flat in which we lived—settled outside of the fairly predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Harlem. That meant a tremendous change for me from the thoroughly Jewish East Side. If a kid is compelled to ingratiate himself, he is also compelled to learn new customs and traditions and modes of thought. He gets away from the whole Jewish fold.

Interviewer: Are you saying that you went into yourself because of the Harlem neighborhood?

Roth: Yes, because of two things. It was also my father. The home, to which kids normally retreat and get some sympathy and understanding, in my case, because of antagonism between my father and myself—ascribe it to all the Freudian things you want—was not a haven for me, especially since my parents quarreled. That meant that I really had no refuge except my mother. Notice that there is another person involved here, my sister, and yet for me she scarcely existed. My mother was my sole comfort, almost companion. It was terribly, terribly Oedipal.

Interviewer: You never mentioned your sister in the book.

Roth: She was never important.

Interviewer: You say you retreated into yourself. What did that mean? Did that mean that you read a lot, or does that mean that you would sit alone. . . ?

Roth: That means that you become an extremely moody type of person and precocious. In the sense that you ruminate a great deal and daydream a great deal and you find your satisfaction in books. I think I must have read every fairy tale, myth, legend, every book of that type that the library had. I simply read fairy tales from morning till night. I'd fall asleep with a fairy tale. Just as an example of the point I'm trying to make: my father is kind of slight, small, rather puny. He is barely five foot, one. And yet it was necessary for me to make him quite strong in the novel. A true naturalistic writer would have made him what he was, scrawny; this was the resentful child talking through the novelist, and *Call It Sleep* is a kind of fairy tale.

Interviewer: In other words, then, most of *Call It Sleep* is autobiographical?

Roth: The interesting thing is this: none of it is autobiographical, or all of it is autobiographical; in the sense that no incident in it does not have some real base somewhere, either in my own life or often in what I heard or saw. Nothing is, you might say, totally unfounded and totally created in a situation, but always it had to be something I felt intimately or had seen. However, the total structure is not autobiographical. Everything is arranged in order to obtain a novelistic structure. The episodes, in the order they happen, are entirely created. Do I make myself clear?

Interviewer: Yes. I wish you'd explain that a little more, though. How did you choose?

Roth: This isn't exactly something that can be answered. You have a feeling that you want to create a structure, a unified form. And in order to achieve this effect you employ any contributory experience, autobiographical or not. But your pri-

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mary aim is the creation of a total effect. In other words, the creation of a novelistic work, effect, of a work of narrative art. Now why this particular aim? That's another thing altogether. Why the symbolism? . . . and so forth.

Interviewer: When you say the creation of an effect, what is the effect?

Roth: I can't tell you the effect that a novel has.

Interviewer: I mean, would it be a particular emotion in a scene that you're trying to convey?

Roth: It's the entirety. It's the summary impact. There is something, evidently, within the individual that responds to this particular literary activity, that wants, that needs the apocalyptic impact of *Call It Sleep*, for example. Why should he feel this need? I don't know why. On the other hand, the apocalyptic portent seems very appropriate at this date, both with respect to the time and novelistically.

Interviewer: How much had you thought out the novel before you began writing?

Roth: I didn't. Let me put it this way. There was a woman who became interested in me, and to whom I dedicated *Call It Sleep*: Eda Lou Walton. She was a professor of English literature at New York University, who thought that I had a great deal of talent, who sponsored this long work—it took about four years—and thought I ought to get a chance to write. So when I started to write, I started autobiographically about things I knew. I tried to relate a situation as I remembered it. And then something strange happened.

When I got back to New York (she had paid for my stay at a Peterborough inn, when she herself had been invited to the MacDowell colony), and I continued writing, I found myself in conflict. Either I continued along the autobiographical line and adhered strictly to fact, or I gave in to the impulses and urges to manipulate the facts, to rearrange the facts in such a way that I felt would make them more interesting. A conflict arose between reality autobiographically and reality imaginatively. I remember that I spent over two weeks pondering which I should do. Should I follow this autobiographical line, or should I begin to rearrange these facts in such a way that they would assume an autonomous meaning. I didn't know that this was being novelistic. Finally, the novelistic impulses won out, and I had then one thing to decide. Was I going back to the beginning to start all over again, or would I pretend that I had done the right thing from the inception and go on from there. I was afraid of starting over again, that seemed a trap. Probably by then one hundred pages were already written, something like that. The experience is very strange, because you get to a stage where you realize that imaginatively you could do a better job of actuality than actuality itself.

Interviewer: Let me backtrack a little. You said that Eda Lou Walton enabled you to write. What were the circumstances?

Roth: She supported me. She lived with me. All of that. She was a woman about eleven years or so older than I . . . a very, very fine person. She also had some kind of, I suppose you would say, psychological difficulty. Why this fixation on youth? I was still an undergraduate. But I think she also had an extraordinary sensitivity to people who had some talent. And a great discernment of talent. I wasn't the only young person she aided artistically. There were other people. She was a poet and literary critic in her own right. I might add, our affair lasted about ten years.

Interviewer: How active was she in the actual preparation of the manuscript? Did you discuss it with her?

Roth: I recall while we were in Peterborough, when I had written the first chapter or so, and I showed it to her, I received some praise. But after I began to write a novel rather than an autobiography, I never showed it to anybody. I sometimes think that she must have read part of it without my knowing, because she was that kind of woman. She wouldn't hesitate, in other words, to intrude upon your private papers; so that she must have reassured herself—I am just guessing at this point—that I was writing, and that my work justified the support she was giving me. And yet, on the other hand, I wonder.

In any event, nobody to my knowledge saw what I was doing, except my sister, who typed the first draft, and a girl, a rabbi's daughter, who typed the final draft. Those were the only people apart from the author who saw the work in progress.

Interviewer: What happened when Eda Lou Walton saw it?

Roth: When she read it, presumably for the first time, and finished it, she burst into tears and said: "You are so much greater an artist than I am."

Interviewer: How did you happen to meet her?

Roth: I went to CCNY, and she taught at NYU. I remarked about her propensity for youth. She had an affair with one of her students who was also rather talented: a young man who was very beautiful and who was in her freshman English class. His name was Lester Winter, of Hungarian Jewish origin. At that time there was something called pre-dental school; it required a couple of years of academic work and that was the reason he found himself in her English class. He intended to be a dentist. I came into the picture in this particular way. Walton decided with another instructor to start a student writers' club. I must say about NYU, it was very advanced, in respect to subjects of contemporary relevance. There

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was greater rapport between student and instructor than anything I had known at CCNY. In this writers' club Lester Winter was invited to become a member because, although he intended to become a dentist, he showed considerable talent as a lyric poet. I was in awe of all these people who came to read for the benefit of the undergraduates. People like Leonie Adams, Louise Bogan, or Margaret Mead, who also wrote poetry—friends of Eda Lou Walton. Margaret brought a friend there, Ruth Benedict, I believe, who was well known in anthropology and wrote poetry too under a *nom de plume*.

Interviewer: You said you were awed when you first joined the group. Did you write?

Roth: No. I didn't join the group. I was merely invited to attend, as a friend of Lester Winter. The curious thing is that Lester Winter, who showed promise as a lyric poet, lapsed into triviality after a year or two, and Eda Lou Walton lost interest in him. And here's this guy, myself, who has been tagging along, who was going to be a zoologist, at best, or otherwise a biology teacher, who begins to manifest a literary bent.

Interviewer: How did you get into writing? What was the first step?

Roth: First, I got to talking. You have to remember: here was a kid of nineteen or twenty, who was only vaguely conscious of what was happening, and here was an older woman with a doctorate, and all the rest. She was very perceptive, and she sized up this individual as one with a much greater gift than anyone she knew—that's how she put it.

Interviewer: And this was when, 1928?

Roth: By 1927, I think, our affair had started. I was now twenty-one and still an undergraduate.

Interviewer: Did she give you tips in the beginning, or did she just say start writing?

Roth: There was really nobody to tell me anything. I mean, either I was too dense, or I had to learn by myself. But you should remember the enormous narrative mass that I already had accumulated, beginning with fairy tales, going on to Victor Hugo, to Mark Twain, to Jack London, and everybody else. Reading completely uncritically, just absorbing, without even being conscious of the construction of a novel, or the nature of a narrative, as I think back on it. Novels I thought were true accounts. When I read Mark Twain, when I read Victor Hugo, I thought this was an actual account.

Interviewer: What year did you begin the book?

Roth: 1930. I graduated from CCNY in 1928. The writing went on from 1930 until the end of '33. Three years to get a first draft, and then some rewriting. It was in galley in 1934. So it was a very, very slow process.

Interviewer: But you had already written something she had read?

Roth: When I was a freshman, we were given the usual term paper: to write a piece of expositional prose. How to build something or other. I had been a plumber's helper the summer before my freshman year, and I wrote what I thought was a piece of how to—how to put in new plumbing. Instead, it was an impression. So, the instructor in the course, Dixon, submitted the theme to *The Lavender,* the CCNY literary magazine. They printed it, and he gave me a D for the course. Eda Lou read it afterward.

Interviewer: Do you have a copy of it?

Roth: I don't know whether I have a copy, or whether my copy is at the Boston University library.

Interviewer: What issue?

Roth: I entered college in 1924, so I would look for it around 1925. I think it had a good beginning—what it's like to be a plumber's helper. It goes a little downhill at the end.

Interviewer: The only piece of writing you did before you began the novel?

Roth: That is a fact.

Interviewer: Of course while at CCNY you did other writing, but it wasn't fiction.

Roth: I did one other thing. There was a course in descriptive writing given by a professor. I received a lot of credit for my descriptions; there was no publication.

Interviewer: What was your major at City College?

Roth: Well, I started off majoring in science. I was going to be a biology teacher or a zoologist. Then part way I began to feel aspirations or intimations of another sort—literary. Slowly my whole college career twisted around, so that I was still getting a science degree, but beginning to major in English, and then at the end some education courses in order to teach. My college career was simply a calamity. I retch in retrospect.

Interviewer: Why?

Roth: Because it was such a complete frustration. I had no feeling of obtaining an education, of realizing myself or my aptitude. Competition for biology courses was keen. By the time I took a biology course I was no longer interested in the subject. The English courses, except for the one in descriptive writing, did nothing to further or develop latent talent, or enhance native capacity. My degree was a travesty.

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Interviewer: You graduated in 1928. What did you do? You said you were at loose ends.

Roth: Well in 1928, the summer of '28, I got a job with the IRT. I was a pipefitter's helper. After graduation, which by the way, was without a diploma because I had lost so many fractions of a credit because of D grades, I got this job through an Irish friend. I worked there into November, or something like that, on the IRT, in the repair barn, and then through other people that I knew, I got a job as a scene shifter at the Provincetown Playhouse. That lasted a few months. And then I got a few substitute teaching jobs. I was a failure as a teacher.

Interviewer: No writing during this period?

Roth: No writing during this period. I was completely at a loss.

Interviewer: So then you came in contact with this group at NYU just about the time you got out of City College, about 1927?

Roth: Oh no, before, because Lester Winter had begun attending NYU in 1924, and by year's end was a member of the writers' club.

Interviewer: But you didn't begin work on the book until 1930; so about three years passed from the time you met Walton until the time you began the book?

Roth: Well, actually I met Eda Lou Walton while a sophomore, which was in 1925, as a friend of Lester Winter. At that time I still thought I was going to be a biology teacher. I had no literary pretensions. It was my friend Winter who was the literary person or showed literary ability.

Interviewer: What happened after you worked at Provincetown and became a substitute teacher?

Roth: That was all after graduation, after 1928. I was at loose ends. So completely a failure did I feel my college education to have been, that I began on my own the study of Italian, German, Latin, and Greek—living at the time in a cold-water flat on Essex Street.

Interviewer: Then how did you begin the book?

Roth: Eda Lou Walton was invited to stay at the MacDowell Colony in 1930, and she put me up at an inn in Peterborough. She was working on a long poem at the time. Given the leisure, I was to begin writing in proof of my ability, to test whether I had literary talent or not.

Interviewer: When you began writing, were you consciously following any books that you had read, did you bring along any books that you had read as models?

Roth: No. I think I said before that I had acquired this tremendous mass of narrative material which apparently quite unconsciously trained me, as it were, in the form that narrative takes, without my knowing explicitly what form narrative should take or does take. How do you build suspense, portray scene, situation, character, etc.? I learned simply by gulping down narratives by the dozens and hundreds, because of the withdrawal from my own milieu. Sooner or later, the very mass, you might say, the quantity asserted its own form: *Call It Sleep* was put together without my ever saying to myself explicitly, this is how a narrative goes. Now, I don't know whether I can say how a narrative goes to this day, but it isn't necessary. It wasn't necessary then. What I did was to develop a sense, an intuition, or second sense of the narrative.

Interviewer: Had you been particularly influenced by any books in childhood?

Roth: Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* in childhood. And in early youth Joyce's *Ulysses,* a decisive influence. In 1925, Eda Lou Walton went to France and when she returned she smuggled into this country a copy of *Ulysses.* I remember it was a paperback. I think you had to smuggle it in because it was banned. She and Lester Winter spent a couple of weeks in a house they rented from one of the instructors at NYU, in a town called Woodstock, which then had a railroad station with planks between the rails and no platform. During that time, I had access to *Ulysses.* Lester wasn't interested in it. He thought it wasn't necessary to go to such great lengths to be original. I read it, and although I understood only a part of it, nevertheless, what impressed me tremendously was that you didn't have to move out of your environment, out of an urban slum, to get all the material you wanted—convertible into great literature. This was the thing that made the greatest impression on me. All you had to do was look around a slummy Harlem street, and if you could find the equivalent vocabulary, you could create great literature. You didn't have to go to sea or to the Klondike or the Yukon or France or any place else.

Interviewer: At the time, had you read people like Dreiser?

Roth: Oh yeah, I had read him. He still didn't seem to relate to my own condition, whereas Joyce did. One of the artists who had an influence on me, I was about fourteen when I first read him, was Coleridge. I lived with "The Ancient Mariner."

Interviewer: What attracted you to it?

Roth: I guess the simplicity and the whole undefined quality of the narrative, and along with the narrative, the words. Speaking of language, I was also influenced by Synge. He insisted that speech should be crisp like an apple.

Interviewer: I know you feel akin to Eliot. What is your favorite work of his?

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Roth: *The Waste Land.* It formulates, in a literary sense, plight. You never knew before that plight could be a legitimate subject for poetry. The poet was writing out of plight.

Interviewer: Did you ever try to write poetry?

Roth: No. I think poetry requires a singing, disciplined tone. I became self-conscious when I tried to write poetry, while in prose I had an unconscious virtuosity.

Interviewer: We have skipped over the whole subject of being Jewish, of Jewish books, of Jewish education.

Roth: It stopped when we left the East Side. Up until then, my Jewish education was similar to the Jewish education of all the other Jewish kids on the East Side. I couldn't conceive of myself as being anything but Jewish. Everybody went to *cheder;* you couldn't imagine not observing the Sabbath. God was in the universe and watching over us. And that snapped when we moved from the homogeneous and extremely protective East Side to Irish Harlem.

You really can see *Call It Sleep* that way. What I did was to take a hostile environment and superimpose it, unjustly, even though it's autobiographical; now you can see how autobiographical it is and isn't. I took a hostile environment and superimposed it on what was really a very protective and homogeneous environment, which is the East Side. Anybody who knew it would know that.

Interviewer: Isn't that a valid criticism of the book someone could make?

Roth: Oh sure, absolutely. There you are. Therefore, it is not authentically autobiographical. It's a very valid criticism if one wants to make it. And yet I can't account for my doing what I did, or why the book became some kind of Jewish immigrant classic.

Interviewer: Has anybody ever said to you: "It wasn't this way"?

Roth: I think one individual once in a review did say that. He was justified. But he was comparing the book to actuality. But as soon as you do that, I don't know whether you're doing a valid thing. Then it's some other kind of book. What was leading me in the creation of *Call It Sleep* was not the actuality, but something inside which was trying to express itself via autobiographical detail.

I tried to express some kind of terror which was not really true of the child's experience on the Lower East Side. It may have been true of the reality that was in the making at the time of the writing, prior to World War II, the Hitler period, and the Holocaust. It may have been a compilation of what the individual felt who was writing. After all, it was not the child who was writing, but the adult who was conscious of all kinds of undercurrents, of tremendous apprehension, of tremendous uncertainty and potential violence. It turns out that he is kind of prophetic of what is to come. I wasn't trying to prophesy. I had no idea. All I was doing was expressing the deepest feeling of the individual at that time.

Interviewer: You said that the break was also a religious break. Does that mean that you didn't have any more formal Jewish education once you moved to Harlem?

Roth: Almost entirely not. I mean it was touch and go. Once in a while, my mother and father would say: "Oh God, he's growing up without anything." They would insist I go to a rabbi and go to *cheder,* and I would attend for a while, and promptly defect.

Interviewer: Did you speak Yiddish at home?

Roth: I spoke Yiddish.

Interviewer: Did your mother ever learn English?

Roth: She learned enough to get by. My father was better at it. He became a waiter after he was a milkman, and fairly fluent.

Interviewer: What was your mother's reaction to the book?

Roth: She never read it. Poor Mama, she couldn't read English. She could read Yiddish. It's so difficult to explain, how much illiteracy there was in a tenement slum. Neighbors would come into our apartment and Mom would read the serial in the newspaper in Yiddish. There would be two or three women who were illiterate, they came from Russia, and I would mock them. Poor Mama, how tolerant she was.

She was very proud the book was published. She trusted me. If you love somebody and she loves you, you can't betray a person under such circumstances.

The reaction of my father was: "I shouldn't have beat him so much."

Interviewer: Did he feel betrayed?

Roth: He felt remorseful. Later in Maine, I wrote "The Final Dwarf" (it appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in the mid-60's). In this story, he began to understand the essential and irreconcilable animosity that existed between us.

Interviewer: Has the book ever been translated into Yiddish or Hebrew?

Roth: Neither. It has been translated into Polish, Finnish, French, Italian, German, and Dutch.

Interviewer: How important was it to your develdevelopment to be a Jew in New York in the 20's?

Roth: The importance in my development of be-

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ing a Jew lay precisely in the lengths I went to, or the efforts I made, to escape the stigma of being Jewish. I had developed an antipathy for the business world. I loathed it. The kids with whom I grew up became very successful. But why didn't I go in the path of becoming a successful Jewish businessman? I didn't want it. Maybe because I read all those damn fairy tales where the values are different.

All my uncles and aunts were deeply engrossed in becoming successful. Their lives were moored to the aim of accumulating and acquiring enough money. With me, it all went the other way, maybe because we moved from the Lower East Side, where it was all taken for granted, to Irish Harlem. The Irish didn't want to make a lot of money. Somehow they wanted to express themselves to the fullest and enjoy themselves. They had a different set of values from those regarded as Jewish values. Maybe in order to escape from the Jewish values, I turned my back on these practical pursuits. But I couldn't, on the other hand, become an Irishman. I was suspended in between. What does one do? You dream of a world outside and the world outside is the world of Coriolanus.

My only way, in retrospect, was the world elsewhere, which for me was the world of art. In that way, I could turn my back on the acquisitiveness of my Jewish brethren, and I could also turn my back on the contempt of the Irish for what I was —a Jew. In art, I could find a form of expression that was still valued in society. I think more than anything else, this is the secret of what makes Roth what he is. The place that seemed to offer a haven was the Village. The Village, with its aura of art, seemed to be the world elsewhere, as Coriolanus said: "I quit this city. There is a world elsewhere." The Village became the one way in which I could escape, or finally shed to an extent the burden of being Jewish. There, one mingled with non-Jews as well as Jews. There, sensibility and art were the entrance fees.

Interviewer: While you were in the Village, did you meet any artists, any people who were writing?

Roth: I did, through Walton. This is a most peculiar thing, because I really was too young, too undeveloped intellectually to meet these people on an equal footing. Here I was an undergraduate, and a slow and groping one, and here were people already well-established in the arts and humanities. There was Mead, for example—where the hell did I come off meeting Margaret Mead on an equal footing; and Hart Crane and Constance Rourke, and there were a number of other people who were either professors or recognized literary figures. Mark Van Doren was there and Hal White of NYU and his wife Margaret Marshall of the *Nation*—of that order. There would be cocktail parties and other gatherings, and where was I—still an undergraduate. Often the conversation was way the hell over my head. I was naive, undeveloped, and without a cultivated background, anything but an intellectual. Here were conversations about society and books, about ideas. Somehow I was supposed to be able to follow. I don't know how I got away with it, because I often didn't know what they were talking about. But they seemed to be interested in my responses, probably because I was so plebeian.

Interviewer: What about people your age who were writing?

Roth: I continually associated with people who were ten or twelve years older than I was. There were some people like William Troy, the literary critic, who was not so much older in age, but far beyond me in accomplishments.

Interviewer: Did you ever talk about writing *per se* with any of the people, like Hart Crane?

Roth: Yeah, I talked about writing, but as I say, I hadn't yet begun to write. Later on, I felt more at home. By the way, Horace Gregory was another I met at that time, and his wife Marya Zaturenska, the poet. As I began to write, I began to understand something of the process; it was kind of self-taught; but before that, I was talking out of what was my background—quite different from theirs. In a sense, the young man already had a rather peculiar way of seeing things and deducing things.

Interviewer: Once you had gotten into the book, you said it took about three years. Were you doing anything else?

Roth: No.

Interviewer: And once it was finished, what happened?

Roth: Well, Walton read it and was very enthusiastic about it. It was sent out to Harcourt Brace first. That would be about the very end of '33 or the beginning of '34. I can't remember. They kept it awhile, and they felt it wasn't relevant to the times. During the period of the Depression, writers tended to write either escapist literature or about the socialist transformation of their central characters due to the cataclysmic upheavals of the Depression. *Call It Sleep* has nothing to do with either, not directly. It was simply trying to express an insight, instead of addressing itself to social problems. So publishers didn't feel that the reading public would be interested. I don't remember where else it went. But it ended up at Ballou and Company.

I don't know if it would have been printed had it not been for another individual who also at that time was having an affair with Walton. She was not casual in her affairs but not exclusive either. She had them simultaneously. This man was a lawyer who ran ads in the New York

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Times on behalf of leftist causes. I recall one about writers that looked like a baseball scorecard. He was a maverick perhaps. I used to wonder what people meant when they said of a person that he had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Well, now I know. Whether for the sake of *Call It Sleep*, or for Eda Lou's sake, *he* brought the novel to Robert Ballou. Ballou at that time had Steinbeck as his author, also Meyer Levin and then Henry Roth. You can imagine what returns authors such as these would bring today. But at that time the poor man was going broke. It didn't take many thousands in those days to buy into a publishing company, which was what this man I've mentioned did. He owned a controlling share of Ballou, and this was the book that he recommended for publication. It might never have gotten printed otherwise. So I owe him a kind of debt, not to mention the debt I owe Eda Lou Walton which is beyond repaying.

Interviewer: What happened when it appeared?

Roth: It received very good reviews. There was no reason why the author should not have felt he didn't have enough talent to warrant going on.

Interviewer: What about sales?

Roth: It sold out the first printing. The publishers were taken by surprise; the second printing was quite late in coming out, sold poorly, and eventually was remaindered. The first printing was perhaps 1,500 copies and the second about the same. The damn book now sells in the first edition for fifty dollars or more.

Interviewer: Did you feel that you should continue?

Roth: Oh yeah, I felt I was successful. I was successful and disciplined and even a recognized literary talent.

Interviewer: What did you do then?

Roth: The book came out in '34, a time when intellectuals were beginning to gravitate toward the Left almost without exception, and I along with the rest. We believed that the solution to societal ills was a new order of things, a socialist order. So I joined the Communist party in 1933. Very soon thereafter I thought I had found a wonderful character for a novel: a proletarian I had come to know in the Communist party, a very colorful guy. He was illiterate, in his early fifties, and sold the *Daily Worker* to eke out a living. It seemed to me that all I had to do was to explore his life's experiences and exploit the picturesque language that he used and I had a novel. I wrote perhaps seventy-five to one hundred pages. Because of Ballou's parlous financial condition, it was submitted to Scribner's, whose editor at the time was Maxwell Perkins. Without any kind of outline, Perkins advanced one thousand dollars for the rights to publish the future novel. That was the end of my literary career. After that came the block which had shattered so many others. You could name a whole slew, who one after another stopped being creative writers. I thought at first each one was blocked for some unique personal reason or other, but apparently it was a social thing. They stopped writing, often became drunks, or defeated, went to Hollywood or into classrooms—a hundred and one different terminations. That became the hallmark of the 30's, incidentally, the decade that disabled an entire generation of writers.

Interviewer: What happened to the manuscript itself?

Roth: That disappeared. The opening chapter appeared in *New Writing* or *New Directions.*

Interviewer: Do you have the magazine?

Roth: I've got the magazine, not the manuscript. When we moved to Maine, I might as well explain, I still had the manuscript of the first one hundred pages; and then, I'm sorry to say, I destroyed it. I burned it together with a couple of very, very valuable journals during the McCarthy period.

Interviewer: After Perkins gave you the advance, what did you do?

Roth: I had already gone to the Middle West to get material for the first part, you understand.

Interviewer: Was there a commune or organization that you went to in the Middle West?

Roth: No. I went to get material for the book.

Interviewer: Did you struggle trying to complete it?

Roth: No, after the advance was paid, I felt as if I had accomplished all I had set out to do. I began to write in a very subjective way, which had nothing to do with the novel itself. I was beginning to find myself involved with myself, and that was a hopeless thing—to try to write of your own predicament when you're overwhelmed by it. You just don't get anywhere. It gets to be a kind of messy lyricism. You can't get out. I did that until I went to Yaddo in '38. There I met Muriel. I think, thanks to her, I realized I was disintegrating, what with all that continual navel-contemplation that I was doing at the time. So I dropped the whole business of writing. I ceased being a writer. I could no longer solve the personal problems that I had gotten myself involved in.

Interviewer: Do you think that the politics of the 30's, not only joining the Communist party but also what was happening in the United States and Europe, played a role in this?

Roth: I'm inclined to think so. I have a feeling

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that the party's demand that you write as a social realist and that you write objectively and that you write about the proletariat and the revolution and so forth, had the effect of pinning me against the wall. Since it was the last thing I could really do, it had the effect of making me overly conscious about myself as a writer. Trying to write, you might say, with an eye on the revolution, or on the party, trying to write with a maximum of social consciousness was not the kind of thing that I was cut out for. Nevertheless I felt a compulsion to do so, and since I couldn't do it. . . .

Interviewer: And yet *Call It Sleep* has been called a proletarian novel, even though it is subjective.

Roth: It is not a proletarian novel. Probably Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* is a proletarian novel.

Interviewer: How active were you in the party?

Roth: Not terribly, although I might say I was badly beaten once while handing out leaflets on the waterfront in favor of industrial unions.

Interviewer: What did Walton say about your joining the party?

Roth: When I joined in '33, or '34, she became disconsolate. She said, "You are destroying yourself as an artist." I can recall waking up in the middle of the night and seeing her sitting on the bed, mourning the destruction of my art. And she was right. The irony is that she later joined the party herself.

Interviewer: Did the FBI harass you?

Roth: They would come to the house in Maine in snap-brim hats, and Muriel would look in the rear-view mirror when she was driving home from school and they would be following. It's a scary business. There has been no figure in American society more sinister than J. Edgar Hoover.

Interviewer: Between '34 and '38 how did you support yourself?

Roth: Walton supported me.

Interviewer: But she couldn't help you artistically at this point?

Roth: No, what she'd done before was to provide me with the kind of surroundings in which I could write. The writing failed, not because of her, but because of myself. I was involved in my own contradictions, my own conflicts and confusions.

Interviewer: Many parts of *Call It Sleep* show great psychological insight. How much of Freud had you read? Have you been influenced at all by Freudianism?

Roth: Actually I didn't need to know that much. I had read almost nothing of Freud. All you had to do was get a few ideas. If you were that type of ruminative personality you could extrapolate Freud's ideas for yourself without having to go into Freud's writings to any degree. You didn't have to make a deep study. Any individual who has insight and has a feeling for psychological involvement is in a sense already a Freudian, or maybe even ahead of Freud. After all, there were artists who were writing profoundly psychologically who didn't know anything about Freud. They knew about human nature and themselves.

Interviewer: What was the effect of the party on your literary development?

Roth: Well, I think the party, as I said before, with its insistence on objectivity, on socialist realism, on the proletariat, on the development of class consciousness and the class struggle, all of this threw into relief my own fuzziness, my own confusions, and therefore I'd attempt to bring myself into line with the party lines. But I never did succeed. It was impossible.

Interviewer: Were there any other writers you knew who were also involved in the Communist party?

Roth: Oh yeah, I think most of them were, in one sense or another.

Interviewer: You said in 1938 you went to Yaddo. You met your wife and you stopped writing? Is that so?

Roth: That's correct. I went to the West Coast afterward in order to break my tremendous dependence on Walton. I stayed there about six months before returning.

Interviewer: Was that Hollywood?

Roth: I had some kind of illusion that maybe I could get something in Hollywood. But that illusion was quickly dispelled, because I'm just not that type. I came back broke. I came back part of the way on a freight train, and part of the way by bus. And then I got on WPA. I worked with a pick and shovel and tried desperately to become a commercial writer, someone who wrote to sell, and I did sell a couple of things to the *New Yorker*.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Roth: I think it was '39, '39 or '40. One short story I sold to the *New Yorker* had to do with a Negro, or black, a rough guy who stood there and watched his truck go to pieces under an elevated trestle—you remember the old elevated trains in New York City. The story was called "Broker." Another one was a recollection of Harlem life called "Somebody Always Gets the Purple," meaning the Purple Fairy Book. And then finally, it seemed just too much trouble to write that way, to write sweat and blood with a view toward selling, and so that ended. The war came on.

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The government offered courses in machine-tool work, free. While I was still on WPA, I sold a short story. I got off WPA, found some substitute teaching, then a steady job teaching at night at Theodore Roosevelt High School. I took the course in machine-tool work in what is called precision metal grinding, and then I did that for five or more years. I worked in machine shops in New York City and Boston.

Interviewer: Did you find a discrepancy between what you had been doing with artists, intellectuals, and so forth, and then going to work in an entirely different setting? Did you miss Village life? Did you miss the artistic life?

Roth: Well, here was a guy who apparently had all that it took to become a successful novelist and failed; the result was a profound and consuming frustration. I was only too glad to get away from it.

Interviewer: Why didn't you become a journalist or an editor of a magazine?

Roth: I didn't think I was that good. I didn't think I was that kind of person. I'm sure that had I had the least gift to become an editor or journalist or anything of the sort, I would have done it. But to do that took a certain kind of ability, and I did not have it. All I had was a sense of the innovative, a lyric ability. Not an ability to address myself to fact and figures, to social institutions, or others. I think what I did have was an impressive narrative skill—and an evocative skill.

Interviewer: Did you try to write something, and then become dissatisfied, or was it that you just couldn't get anything down on paper?

Roth: The former. I would become dissatisfied with my writing, and not go on. I had written the first section of my second novel and made an outline of what I was to do next, and I was supposed to go to the Middle West again and collect fresh material and I just couldn't get myself to do it. So what happened? I am not quite sure. Sometimes I think it was a failure of will.

Interviewer: I can understand your conflict: wanting to create and not being able to create again after *Call It Sleep*.

Roth: Yes. Look at the symbolism of *Call It Sleep* at the end. A shunt is thrown across the third rail and there is a short circuit. All hell breaks out.

Do you think I knew what was happening when I joined the Communist party? I was supposed to go on to write about a Jewish immigrant boy who went from his Harlem slum and found himself at last at home in Greenwich Village in the world of art. Communism intervened as a way of solving the problems of humanity, as a way of absolving me from being a Jew. But it didn't work. It didn't work for anybody. That was the shunt.

Interviewer: During the war you worked in the machine-tool trade. What did you do after the war?

Roth: Muriel and I now had two children. We were married in '39. I wanted to leave New York, and part of the reason I wanted to leave was my feeling of intense frustration. This city had, so to speak, paid into me, had fed me, on every street corner. I had become a connoisseur of its changes of mood. And yet I could no longer use it or digest it. Here it was supplying me with literary stimulation, and I couldn't respond to it. So I think that was the reason for my wanting to get away from New York. Also, there was a desire on both Muriel's and my part to give the kids something better than the streets of New York. But I think that was secondary. The primary thing was the frustration I felt in the metropolitan environment at not being able to exploit it as I had before. There was nothing else that I could think of doing, except to get out of there.

I already had attained to a high degree of skill as a precision grinder. It's a very specialized skill, incidentally, and I don't really know why the hell I chose it. Toolmakers in general don't like working with tolerances as close as those I had to work with: ten thousandths of an inch. And it's all done on a grinding machine or by what's called lapping. By the way, you can't do it by any other method because the work has been subjected to a hardening process, and only grinding takes off ten thousandths of an inch at a time. I think I had a knack for it. Also I came to the craft with a considerable mathematical background, so that helped

Since I had the skill I could go anywhere. It was then very much in demand. I got a job with Keystone Camera in Boston. But once you have been bitten by this creative bug, if you want to put it that way, once you have known creativity at its height, which *Call It Sleep* was to me, it doesn't much matter what other kind of work you do. What the hell else will ever satisfy you thereafter? I worked for a year and a half at Keystone, then we left Boston and went to Maine. Real estate there at that time was literally dirt cheap. For $1,200 you could buy a house in fairly good shape and 110 acres.

Interviewer: What year was that?

Roth: That was '46, September 1946. I left Keystone, and we moved to Maine. Years before, part of *Call It Sleep* had been written there in 1932—and I developed an attachment for the place or the state. We moved to the town of Montville. It was back country. The first fall there I shot two deer. I never shot a deer after that. I never wanted to.

The joke about Montville is that it's located between two towns: one called Liberty and the other called Freedom. So I always told people that

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we were damned emancipated after we moved there. Anyway, there was no work to be had in Montville, other than woodcutting. I was no woodcutter, so we moved to Augusta, Maine. I found a job in the Augusta State Mental Hospital, where I worked for the next four years as a hospital attendant, or psychiatric aide, as they called it. Meanwhile, Muriel taught elementary school. She only had three degrees.

Interviewer: Were you paid room and board in that hospital as well?

Roth: In the beginning you got room and board and $26.70 or $27.60 a week. I don't remember.

Interviewer: Did you live at the hospital then?

Roth: I lived at the hospital a year, while Muriel taught school in another town.

Interviewer: Were you working with patients?

Roth: Since I was a college graduate, and not too much of an alcoholic, I was elevated to supervisor, supervisor of the second shift. But then I started to organize the guys. We were all getting so little money. I tried to get them into a union. And that went against the superintendent's ideas of what a supervisor's duties should be.

Interviewer: And he fired you?

Roth: He couldn't very well fire me. There would have to be cause. But he demoted me, and put me on the worst shift, the midnight shift, and also put me on what was called the "shit ward," the infirmary, because the poor geriatrics, the senile patients, were committed there. I was continually occupied changing beds, linen, all of that. It was all right.

We fought like hell to get our room and board commuted to cash and increased—it was only five dollars a week in lieu of room and board—and thereby live at home. The superintendent was a cagey guy who deliberately tried to provoke me as he had succeeded in doing before with other attendants who had tried to unionize, and then he fired them for insubordination. But something or other warned me, although I have a very bad temper, something warned me this time, brother, you'd better stay in control.

Also, Muriel was suffering from an undiagnosable syndrome akin to Guillaume Barré, and was helplessly paralyzed and we had two kids to care for.

The superintendent was a louse. However, the poor bastard contracted Parkinson's disease after a few years, so I felt sorry for him. When he quit the job, I wrote him a letter expressing my admiration for his devotion to a difficult task.

I wish to hell I had sat down and written what I saw and did in that hospital while I was working there. It just shows you how unprofessional I was. How little I was facing reality and practicality. Christ, a guy like myself just writing his day-to-day experiences at a place like that could easily have written something that would have sold.

But all I could write about was my quandary and all I did was fill up space. I was a mess. Sometimes I wondered whether the right guy had been given the keys to the place.

Interviewer: Were you in much contact with the patients' problems?

Roth: Not a great deal. We were mostly custodial. There was once a suggestion made by one of the doctors that I might be of use in the role of therapist. Nothing came of it.

Interviewer: What year did you leave the hospital?

Roth: In '53. The same year that good old Joe Stalin of unlamented memory died. I left in January, and I think Joe died in February or March. When I left the hospital, I began raising waterfowl in Maine, and continued until 1968.

Interviewer: Were you still involved in the party in 1953?

Roth: Oh yeah, I still thought of myself as a member of the party: very loyal and committed, but all the time I was only too well aware that my feeling about Stalinism was one of fear. Communism was not, as I have said, a creative thing for me. I could not develop in it. It was sterile. I got no ideas out of it. I put no ideas into it.

Interviewer: Fear of what?

Roth: I don't know. Fear of the terrible discipline that was expected of me. Fear of not measuring up to what was expected of a comrade. What's the word, the monolithic attitude, and I knew I wouldn't be able to conform.

Interviewer: Why then did you continue to be involved in the party?

Roth: A matter of conscience. You thought it was the thing you should be doing to help change the world. That was your idea of how to help improve the world, improve the lot of the deprived and the oppressed.

One final thing: in '67 the June war broke out in the Middle East. Now, I think this is an important point. Quite contrary to party discipline, party program, party line, I felt myself turning away from party directives and turning toward Israel. Despite what I thought I should be doing or feeling, I nevertheless began to side more and more with Israel in the months and days preceding the war. You remember, in May, the Syrians were going to drive the Jews into the sea. I felt a greater and greater sense of sympathy with Israel. Now, whether the Holocaust had something to do with it or not, I don't know. As a matter of fact, I was not so much affected by the Holocaust, but I

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began to feel a terrible anxiety on behalf of all those Jews who were going to be driven into the sea, and who apparently were going to be annihilated, and I couldn't stand the thought that I was supposed at the same time to say hoorah.

According to the party line, the Arabs were anti-imperialists and they were only fighting for their own freedom from imperialists. As a good Communist-party member, it was my manifest duty to support them, but on the contrary, it was for Israel that I felt a tremendous sense of concern. It was Israel that I hoped would prevail in the coming war and that marked the beginning of a great change in myself in every respect. When Israel defeated the Arabs in a matter of a few days, my exaltation knew no bounds. I felt at last that Jews had redeemed themselves by self-sacrifice and sheer valor. From that point on, and there were other reasons, I experienced a resurgence of my long dormant literary vocation. I began to try to set down my thinking on why I felt this way about Israel—by the way, we were in Mexico at the time. The reports I read—the first one was that the Israelis had destroyed the Egyptian air force—were all in Spanish. My Spanish wasn't too good, so I had to dig it all up and go back again and read it over.

For the first time, I began to write along entirely different lines. No longer was it merely narrative, and no longer merely perceptions or impressions, but rather trying to think what the hell do I feel about Communism, what do I feel about Israel, what do I feel about Judaism, and why. That marked the beginning of the resurgence of my own writing.

I now write. It's no longer recognizably narrative, although it may include narrative elements. I no longer attempt to maintain continuity. But I write and that's the important thing.

The gestation period of an individual's rebirth is of undetermined duration. The only valid proof for a writer is to produce something of literary merit. When that happens, I shall certainly seek publication. Israel is my chief concern now and any work of literary merit that I can achieve would be in her behalf, to muster sympathy and support for her struggle for survival and security.

This reunion with Judaism I regard as a rebirth. I am now using my art to its maximum in order to build support and sympathy for Israel. The internal problems of that country are secondary to my fervent wish to see the nation survive.

My conversion reminds me of Eliot's conversion. *The Waste Land* verges on the unintelligible. The only way he reclaimed coherence was by conversion. It gave him a center.

Interviewer: What attracts you to Israel?

Roth: At last we have become a nation. We have ceased being a shadow people, a city people.

Interviewer: What are your future plans?

Roth: I have been invited to Israel for a short time this summer and fall. I have enough money now to live on frugally; all the fame—the legacy of my youth—a guy can want. A devoted wife.

There's one act of a play begun. I have a file box. It's about a foot high. When that gets so I can't close it, I will call my work done.

Like Eliot, I will "die" twice. My first death was when I joined the party and died as an artist. Until my reprieve, I had been waiting for the second death.

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Russia—Beyond Brezhnev

Walter Laqueur

ALMOST every new Russian ruler for the last two centuries has been hailed as a liberator upon acceding to power, and in almost every case initial euphoria has given way to disappointment, and worse. When Nicholas I died in 1855, even the harshest critics of the Russian system (the exiled Alexander Herzen among them) welcomed his successor, Alexander II, in glowing terms, especially after a few reforms were announced. Within six or seven months their enthusiasm had waned: "We confess our mistake. . . . This is the same regime, sweetened by molasses."

The pattern repeated itself when Stalin came to power in the late 20's. Some Western observers hailed the event as a long-awaited return to normalcy after the excesses of Lenin and Trotsky. This, for instance, was how Sir Bernard Pares, an Englishman and one of the most distinguished early Sovietologists, saw it, not only at the time but even fifteen years later when Russia under Stalin appeared to him "as a nearer approach to true democracy than the liberal movement before the revolution." And when Stalin died in 1953, needless to say, expectations of a bright new future were even higher.

In many ways, the optimism that accompanied Stalin's death was justified. There was every reason to assume that his successors would follow a policy more rational, less arbitrarily cruel and oppressive, than that of the murderous "father of peoples," who had clearly become mentally unbalanced during the last years of his life. One of the most optimistic voices at the time was that of the late Isaac Deutscher, who wrote that the coming epoch might bring with it a "breathtaking reversal of the process by which the Soviet democracy of the early years of the revolution had been transformed into autocracy." Deutscher thought that the economic needs of the country made the progress toward liberalization more or less inevitable; economic change would result in political change. "The nation has outgrown authoritarian tutelage," Deutscher wrote, and a return to socialist democracy was just around the corner: "For decades freedom was banned from Russia, because it was, or was supposed to be, the enemy of socialism. . . . But freedom may once again become the ally and friend of socialism; and then the forty years of wandering in the desert may be over for the Russian revolution."

It was a heartwarming vision, but, alas, it was not to be. Yet the question of where and why Deutscher went wrong is still (or again) of considerable interest. Was it his Marxist faith that led him astray? For he was of course naive, to put it no more strongly, to assume, in the light of the Fascist and Stalinist experience, that industrialization and modernization were bound to lead to greater political freedom. Yet Deutscher's Marxist faith had a curious admixture of subjectivism and voluntarism. In any other country Deutscher would have discovered historical laws and necessities and class interests; in Russia, he could see only regrettable aberrations, individual mistakes, accidents of history which could be easily rectified. Historical materialism, in short, did not apply to the Soviet Union, a country about which Deutscher, in common with many others to this day, felt free to write like an old-fashioned Hegelian idealist.

Now that yet another change in leadership is taking place in the Soviet Union, new commentators in the tradition of Sir Bernard Pares and Isaac Deutscher have appeared. One of them is Jerry F. Hough, who teaches political science at Duke University. In a recent article on the Soviet succession (Washington *Post*, April 17, 1977), he presents arguments reminiscent of his illustrious predecessors.

Not that Professor Hough thinks everything is rosy in the Soviet Union, but by and large it has become in his opinion a more liberal and democratic society. A real diffusion of power has taken place, he writes, with more and more people participating in decision-making—as shown by the fact that over 50 per cent of the college-educated males between the ages of thirty and sixty are members of the Communist party. The position of the poor and of the dissidents has also, he tells us, steadily improved since 1964. As for the future, there is a strong natural tendency toward a "more relaxed type of authoritarianism," such as is practiced in Poland. From this it follows, in Professor

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Hough's view, that America should support those who work inside the regime for a "Polish" solution, and should not support the dissidents, who are dangerous people because they call for strict observance of the Soviet constitution—a constitution which "is not to be taken seriously"—and because they stand for "revolutionary change." (On another occasion, at a conference in Washington, Professor Hough went so far as to compare the Soviet dissidents to Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman who, he said, once spread comparable exaggerations abroad about repressive conditions in America.) He recommends that the Carter administration soft-pedal the human-rights aspects of the Helsinki accords, reassure Soviet leaders—who suffer from a "deep sense of military inferiority" —with "mutual" gestures of arms restraint, and scale down or perhaps discontinue the activities of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty.

Soviet leaders would no doubt be amused by this effort to ascribe to them a deep feeling of military inferiority, which must be so deep as to be hidden from themselves as well as from the rest of the world, especially that part of it which has lately been feeling the effects of this "inferiority." Equally amusing is the idea that membership in the Communist party is somehow bound up with the Soviet decision-making process (it is simply a prerequisite for getting and keeping positions of any importance in most fields of human endeavor in the Soviet Union). Poland, moreover, is the worst possible example Professor Hough could have chosen for his thesis: "authoritarianism" there may be relatively weak, but it is not at all relaxed. The Polish regime has managed to alienate the workers, the Church, the peasants, and the intelligentsia; having no political base, it is kept in power simply by the fear of open Soviet intervention. Then there is a statement like the following: "We have been too quick to assume that the increase in military spending [in the Soviet Union] denotes a leadership plan to achieve military superiority, and we have failed to consider that it may be part of the evidence that the leadership has relatively few conscious policy intentions and is primarily mediating among specialized elites." As the Duke of Wellington said: if you can believe this, you can believe anything.

This curious mixture of naive misreading of domestic trends in the Soviet Union and open cynicism (the Soviet constitution "is not to be taken seriously") is difficult to explain. Mitigating circumstances can be found in the case of Pares, for the Soviet system had been in existence for only a short time when he wrote about it, and even perhaps in the case of Deutscher. When it comes to Professor Hough, one is bound to agree with his own statement (although he does not appear to mean to apply it to himself) that "our misunderstanding of the Soviet regime is now probably greater than at any time since World War II."*

It is instructive to compare Professor Hough's euphoria with the far more somber analysis presented by leading European Communists. Thus, Santiago Carrillo, head of the Spanish Communist party, writes in a book published earlier this year that the Stalinist political system of the Soviet Union has not been transformed, has not been democratized, and even remains coercive in its relations with other Communist states, as was brutally demonstrated by the military occupation of Czechoslovakia (*Eurocomunismo y Estado*, Barcelona, 1977).

MISCONCEPTIONS and wishful thinking aside, it is of course undeniable that real changes have taken place in the Soviet Union since Stalin's days. Neither the Khrushchev cult nor, subsequently, the Brezhnev cult has been remotely comparable to the adulation of Josef Stalin. There have been no bloody purges for many years; the few courageous dissenters have been harassed, arrested, and imprisoned, but apparently not one of them has been shot. Power is no longer wielded by one man: the Soviet Union is ruled today by the 20 members and alternate members of the Politburo, the 11 secretaries of the Central Committee (6 of whom also belong to the Politburo), and the 426 members and alternate members of the Central Committee. (The Central Committee is convened but rarely, if only because its members are dispersed all over the Soviet Union.) Within the Politburo there is an inner group made up of the four senior members, all of them over seventy years old: Brezhnev, Suslov, Kirilenko, and Kosygin (there were five prior to Podgorny's ouster last May). There has been on the whole a great deal of continuity since the Khrushchev era; only five Politburo members have lost their positions for political reasons in over a decade.†

* An equally strange theory of Soviet liberalization has recently been propounded by Victor Zorza, quoting Alexander Yanov, a Soviet emigré writer. According to Zorza, Yanov warns that a breakdown in détente would lead to the replacement of the present, "centrist" leadership by a Communist-nationalist regime which would follow an isolationist policy "and could evolve into a Russian Nazi system." The only way the "centrist" leadership can overcome the threat from the "little Stalins" is by allying itself with the managerial technocracy, or new class, which itself is attempting to secure its position by limiting the absolute power of the top Kremlin rulers. The West should therefore help the new class to "assert and extend its own authority in the interest of producing a regime able and willing to cooperate in a new international system." Détente, in other words, is needed to prevent the "danger" of Soviet isolationism. If the logic of this argument seems a little doubtful, the historical parallel to Nazism borders on the incredible—although the thought of isolationism as a pronounced feature of Nazism is certainly a novel one.

† Brezhnev's recent elevation to the Presidency does not mean the restoration of one-man rule but, on the contrary, the opening of a new, more acute phase in the struggle for succession.

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Below the supreme leadership are the district and regional party secretaries and the central and local party and state apparatuses—altogether a bureaucracy consisting of some three million persons. But to this day all orders emanate from the center: if Khrushchev made a modest effort to decentralize and to give greater autonomy to local representatives of the party, the process has been reversed. In this respect as in others, de-Stalinization ended with Khrushchev, and Deutscher's vision of freedom of speech, even within the party, is still a chimera.

The party secretaries rule a population which is largely apolitical. The observation, made by foreign visitors to Czarist Russia, that the Russian government always treated the people as minors, not fully competent to look after their own affairs, is as true now as it was at the turn of the century. Appeals for mass participation, to be sure, are issued almost without interruption, but these are always combined with calls for iron discipline and the need to strengthen the state and the party. Mass participation there is—in order to demonstrate conformity. A few observers of the Soviet scene have drawn encouragement from the fact that some local issues—such as the number of hospital beds to be provided, or of kindergartens—are decided locally, and sometimes are even accompanied by discussion; the supreme leadership cannot any longer impose totally arbitrary or unrealistic schemes on the population. This, however, was also true in the past. Even Stalin was not all-powerful; the shortcomings of human nature (and sometimes simply of nature), place a limit on the ultimate effectiveness of decrees issued from the center. There has always been *some* debate in the Soviet Union, on questions ranging from abortion to linguistics; it is on issues of political significance that there has never been any debate at all, as is illustrated by the present "discussion" of the new Soviet constitution.

A great many things have changed since Stalin's day, then, but the monopoly of political power, the character of the institutions, the instruments of propaganda and control have not been essentially affected; they may have been streamlined, but they have not been liberalized, and they are not likely to be in the foreseeable future. The idea that modernization would bring about a diffusion of power, that in an increasingly complex society, experts (the "intelligentsia") would play an ever more important political role, has so far been disproved by events.

But is it not possible that pressure from below will eventually result in far-reaching changes in the Soviet system? Some who argue that it will mainly have in mind the unsatisfactory economic situation and the aspirations of the national minorities. As to the economy, Soviet performance, measured by official promises, has certainly been less than brilliant. According to the party program of 1961, per-capita production in the Soviet Union was supposed to overtake the United States by 1970, but in 1977 the per-capita GNP is still (not quite) on the level of Greece and Spain. There has been, and will continue to be, a relative decline in the production of consumer goods. Furthermore, the Soviet economy faces considerable difficulties in its endeavor to increase productivity and capital formation.

The Soviet economy has, it is true, been less violently shaken by cyclical ups and downs than the economies of non-Communist nations. There is no unemployment (except the hidden one, which is not extensive), and the mineral wealth of the country will make it far less vulnerable to crises in the years to come than most other industrialized countries.* On the other hand, it will have to extend considerable help to its less fortunate allies and satellites.

In short, the Soviet regime provides its citizens with a living standard which is still low by comparison with the West, even though it offers more security. The real problem facing the Soviet leadership in this respect is not an acute crisis but the fact that human beings are notoriously ungrateful, that unfulfilled promises give additional impetus to rising expectations, that even the most accomplished propaganda cannot make up for shorter working hours, more ample living conditions, or a greater supply of consumer goods. Popular dissatisfaction may well bring about economic reforms at a future date, reforms that were vaguely discussed in the late 50's and early 60's but then shelved. It is not at all clear, however, that economic reform need or would affect the monopoly of political power.

THE problem of the nationalities, with their manifold claims and aspirations, is on the other hand in many ways more threatening to that monopoly. According to the last Soviet census, Russians constituted 53.4 per cent of the population of the USSR. Since there is reason to believe that this figure is slightly exaggerated, and since the rate of population growth is considerably higher among the Turkish peoples of the Soviet Union than among the Slavs (the former having increased by 50 per cent since 1960, the latter by only about 15 per cent), it is no longer certain whether the Russians actually constitute a majority. This would be of little interest if it were true, as is officially maintained, that the peoples of the Soviet Union coexist and collaborate with

* A comparison of the Soviet growth rate with that of the other six leading industrial nations shows that in 1971 the Soviet Union ranged third (after Japan and France); in 1972 it was seventh and last; in 1973 and 1974 it was second; in 1975 it led the field—but this was a year of general crisis. In 1976 and 1977 Soviet rates of growth have been (or promise to be) about average in comparison with other industrialized nations.

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each other in a spirit of friendship and solidarity unprecedented in the history of mankind, thus creating a new and higher type of national community. But in fact there are many indications that ethnic tensions persist in the Soviet Union and have been reinforced by the global trend toward nationalism.

Soviet nationalities policy under Stalin was one of undisguised, forced, often brutal Russification; this was modified after his death, but since the early 60's warnings have been voiced against bourgeois nationalism among the non-Russian peoples (even though it is not easy to understand how such nationalism could possibly exist among peoples who have no bourgeoisie now, and for the most part had none in the past). In some Russian circles, on the other hand, there has been within the last decade something akin to a cult of the Russian past—the village tradition, Russian folk customs and art, and so forth. Even if mainly cultural in character and strictly unofficial in inspiration, this trend too points to a revival of nationalism, at the very least on the emotional level.

The main problem is not the resistance of the non-Russian peoples to a cultural program that aims to force them to accept the Russian language and all that goes with it; the gradual emergence of Russian as a *lingua franca* is a natural process. Nor is it correct to say that the non-Russian peoples have been culturally neglected; higher education has in fact spread more quickly among them than in the Russian republic. But as experience in Ireland and in other parts of the globe has shown, linguistic assimilation by no means makes for political solidarity; on the contrary, the emergence of highly educated local cadres creates new tensions—in the Soviet case reinforcing the pressure for the de-Russification of the local party and state apparatus. Russia, in any event, was never really a melting pot, and the political limits of cultural assimilation are now clearly discernible.

Soviet nationalities problems have on the whole been handled with considerable expediency. While there seems to be an awareness of the potentially explosive character of these issues, they are hardly ever discussed in public. What is true with regard to Soviet Jews and Germans applies by and large to the Soviet nationalities policy in general: the number of exit visas has been increased, but at the same time the militants have been arrested. The purges of leading cadres have been more frequent and more thoroughgoing in the non-Russian republics than in Moscow, but by way of compensation there has been a deliberate effort to co-opt more non-Russians into the Politburo (including the secretaries general of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekstan, a Balt, and, of course, some leaders of Ukrainian origin). Russian leaders no doubt harbor few illusions of a truly integrated Soviet nation in the near future. Present policy is to defuse the inevitable conflicts by establishing close collaboration with the leadership of the non-Russian nationalities, in order to create an identity of material interests and to make them feel that they have no future except inside the wider framework of the Soviet Union. Given the circumstances, it is a realistic policy, but there is no guarantee it will succeed.

While the Russian republic has grown richer over the last two decades, most of the non-Russian peoples (except the Balts), being less industrialized, have grown relatively poorer. Non-Russian leaders are treated in Moscow with respect, but it is also true that none of them plays a role in the party leadership even remotely comparable to that once played by a Stalin, a Beria, or even a Mikoyan; the same seems to be true with regard to the supreme army command and the state security organs. Nor is it certain to what extent the collaborating elites in the national republics can be politically relied upon in Moscow; their own ambitions apart, they have to represent, at least to some degree, the claims of their fellow nationals, so as not to lose their credibility at home. This is not at all easy to accomplish, for at a time when even the smallest national groups in Asia and Africa have attained independence, with seats in the United Nations and diplomatic recognition, Uzbeks and Georgians, Azerbaijans and Kazakhs want at the very least to be masters in their own house. The Soviet Union is the last surviving multinational empire, and hence potentially quite vulnerable. Whatever concessions will have to be made could produce a momentum of far greater political significance than economic reforms. Hence the enormous sensitivity shown by Soviet leaders to separatist propaganda from outside.

None of this is meant to imply that the days of the Soviet domestic empire are numbered; empires disintegrate only when their rulers lose self-confidence and nerve, and there are no signs that this is happening in the Kremlin. Nor is there a united front of non-Russians, as there was, at least for a little while, in 1917. On the contrary, the claims of some of the non-Russian groups collide with the interests of others, and this opens a great many possibilities for a policy of divide-and-conquer, as was practiced by the Czarist regime. Still, it is fairly safe to predict that as centrifugal trends increase the new Soviet leadership will have to devote far more attention than in the past to nationalities policy.

BY COMPARISON, the challenge represented by the intelligentsia is almost insignificant. Once upon a time the Russian intelligentsia was a revolutionary force, but the qualities that made it so—loyalty to great ideas, a willingness to fight and to sacrifice—were confined to a small number of people. It is true that the intelligentsia turned decisively against the Czarist government toward the end of the century. By the

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same token, there are very few members of the intelligentsia today who are not critical of at least some aspects of the regime. But this kind of opposition, consisting of critical mumblings and anti-establishment jokes, is easy enough for the regime to live with. Occasional threats and occasional promises will keep the intelligentsia in line.

Indeed, aside from some individuals of exceptional courage, the record of the Soviet intelligentsia as a class has not been much better than that of intellectuals under other dictatorships. Some Soviet intellectuals have joined the ruling group and become *nachalniki,* bosses of one sort or another; others, not the best or the brightest, have offered fulsome praise to the historical mission of the party and its giant achievements. The great majority, while paying lip-service to official slogans, have tried not to get involved in politics. Talented young people of integrity are not encouraged to choose a political career. Among the younger members of the intelligentsia, official ideology is treated with skepticism, even open cynicism. But skeptics and cynics, lacking firm beliefs and values, will not, as a rule, choose the path of open defiance, with all the dangers involved. Rather than risk their careers, they will opt for the "private sphere" and invest their energies in their respective professional fields. They may be better informed about politics than the average Western intellectual, but they will essentially be passive onlookers. This general passivity of the intelligentsia is felt in the cultural sphere perhaps most acutely; even the late 50's were an artistically exciting period in comparison with the 70's.

Twenty years ago it was widely believed among Soviet experts in the West that the Soviet Union could not possibly stand still: it would either be transformed or it would degenerate. Yet there was a third possibility, as the years since have shown. Economic development has been coupled with political, social, and cultural stagnation at home, and a cautiously activist policy abroad. This combination could endure for a very long time.

WHAT will the future leadership of the Soviet Union look like? In the near future, after Brezhnev goes, it seems likely that there will be a reshuffle among members of the old guard. But any such arrangement would be provisional; effective power sooner or later will pass into the hands of the younger members of the Politburo and the Secretariat. The transition may be smooth, for Brezhnev has placed his protégés in strategically important positions in the party and state apparatus, but it is equally possible that a struggle for power will break out, as happened after Stalin's death. The Central Committee may try to reassert its authority, as it did on at least two occasions in the past (in 1957 and in 1964), by deposing some of the present leaders and promoting new ones. But it is also not certain that any of this really matters; it would be of importance only if the struggle for power resulted in a one-man dictatorship, something that seems unlikely except perhaps in a national or international emergency. The trauma of the Stalinist era (and to a far lesser extent of Khrushchev's rule) has taught the upper bureaucratic crust the obvious lesson that its tenure, indeed its physical survival, cannot be assured under conditions of totally arbitrary rule; hence the necessity for a balance of power in the top leadership.

The generation that will succeed Brezhnev, Suslov, and Kosygin knows little about the outside world. This is not to say that the new leaders will be "Russia firsters." The fact that the Soviet Union is a superpower has a logic of its own, and Soviet leaders are drawn into foreign affairs as irresistibly as are American Presidents. In this respect there is bound to be continuity with the immediate past, since the new leaders will certainly want to strengthen the Soviet military potential and make the most of Western weaknesses without causing a breakdown in détente. They may in fact be more dynamic in the pursuit, partly because younger people are usually more enterprising than their elders, but also because, in contrast to their predecessors, they have yet to prove themselves. In addition, the fact that Soviet domestic problems are so difficult to deal with, not to say intractable, may in itself contribute to a strong emphasis being placed on foreign policy, a field where striking successes may appear more likely. This is a well-known historical syndrome, and one not limited to Communist regimes.

Thus, the new leaders are unlikely to give up on the traditional ideological ambitions of the Soviet regime. The notion, in any case, that any Soviet leaders—whether those currently in place or those who will succeed them—no longer wish to see Communists coming to power in certain other countries because this is bound to cause tension and conflict within the Communist world, is based on a profound misunderstanding of Soviet psychology and policy. The Soviet Union is, after all, still the leader of the Communist camp; if it were not to press for the victory of Communism on a global scale, it would lose all credibility.

Nor, finally, are the Soviet leaders of the next generation likely to cut back on their military forces. The Soviet Union is a superpower, but not by virtue of its economic performance or the irresistible attraction of its official ideology. It has achieved the status of a superpower through its military strength. No Soviet leader is unaware of this fact, or can afford to disregard it. And the maintenance of a large military establishment carries with it the additional advantage of justifying economic shortcomings and political dictatorship —all said to be necessary to protect the achievements of "socialism" from powerful enemies even at a time of détente.

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POLITICAL and social systems can remain stagnant for amazingly long periods of time. I have stressed some of the destabilizing factors threatening the Soviet political regime, but there are others pointing in the opposite direction. Thus the growing complexity (and vulnerability) of human societies reinforces in the long term the trend toward strict controls, toward the concentration of power in a few hands, and toward political domination by a relatively small elite. If there is discontent in the Soviet Union there is also a substantial part of the population, counting perhaps in the millions, which has a vested interest in the regime and which will oppose any change out of the fear that change will adversely affect its own status and privileges. This refers not only to those in the key positions of party and state, the economy, the army, and the security organs, but also to the lesser secretaries, officers, instructors, and bureaucrats, in whose hands lie the tools of coercion and propaganda. Although, historically speaking, dictators and ruling groups do sometimes lose their hold, such a prospect is not overly likely in a regime in which the dictatorship has been deeply institutionalized, and which can rejuvenate itself biologically if not ideologically.

The truth is that the Soviet regime is without precedent, not because the revolution from above accomplished its aims but because for the first time in history the political results of revolution have been successfully "frozen." True, there are enormous differences between the situation now and in 1950, and between 1950 and 1925. There have been periods of senseless slaughter, and others in which a bare minimum of violence was used. But the decisive lesson is that all these changes have taken place within clearly defined parameters, all scheduled to keep the regime in power, if possible with little coercion, if necessary by brutal means.*

Of course, all things, and all political and social regimes, are subject to change, and the Soviet Union is no exception. But if one day there is to be a movement toward freedom in that country, it will be triggered by forces and will take place in circumstances that cannot be foreseen today. As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, freedom is still the enemy of socialism and socialism is still thought to be possible without democratic institutions. The wandering still continues in a desert which has officially been declared an oasis.

* It is this element of stability which no doubt helps to account for the curious fact that in the West favorable comments on the Soviet Union are likely to come today more often from conservative circles than from the Left. The writings of George Kennan are an example; more recently, Enoch Powell, the eloquent spokesman of the extreme Right in Britain, has published an almost glowing account of his recent trip to the Soviet Union (London *Times*, June 21, 1977). Mr. Powell notes with approval that "here is a state at once intensely conservative and intensely nationalist," and he observes with equal approval that "it is self-evident to the Russians that the citizen belongs not merely to the state but to a specific part of the state, and has no right to leave his home or his country at will." It is quite obvious what there is in Soviet society to attract these conservatives—stable order and discipline imposed by a strong authority.

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Iron

A Memoir

Primo Levi

OUTSIDE THE walls of the Chemistry Institute it was night, the night of Europe: Chamberlain had returned from Munich tricked, Hitler had entered Prague without firing a shot, Franco had crushed Barcelona and was settled in Madrid. Fascist Italy, a lesser pirate, had occupied Albania, and the premonition of imminent disaster was condensed in houses and streets, in cautious conversations and in drowsy consciences, like slimy dew.

But the night did not penetrate those thick walls: Fascist censorship itself, masterpiece of the regime, kept us apart from the world, in a white, anesthetized no-man's-land. About thirty of us had got over the difficult hurdle of first-year exams and had been admitted to the second-year qualitative-analysis laboratory. We had entered that huge, dark, smoky room like someone who enters the House of God, reflecting as he goes. The work in the previous laboratory, where I had done experiments with zinc, seemed elementary to us now, just as when children play at cooking: you always did get something in the end, somehow or other, maybe too little of it, maybe not quite pure, but you always did: you really had to be incompetent, or stubborn, not to succeed in obtaining magnesium sulphate from magnesite, or potassium bromide from bromine.

Here it was not like that: here things got serious, the confrontation with matter, both our mother and our enemy, was more taxing and more immediate. At two o'clock in the afternoon Professor D., an ascetic, absentminded-looking man, handed each of us exactly one gram of a certain powder. By the end of the next day we had to complete a qualitative analysis of it, make a note of which metals and non-metals it contained; our report had to be in writing, as clear-cut as a court statement, because neither doubts nor hesitations were allowed. Every time we had to make a choice, we had to make up our minds: a mature and responsible task that, for which Fascism had not prepared us. It had a good, dry, clean taste.

Some elements were easy, obvious, incapable of concealing themselves, like iron and copper; others were deceitful, elusive, like bismuth and cadmium. We had a way to discover them, a laborious, age-old scheme of systematic research, a kind of steam-roller-*cum*-fine-comb from which nothing, in theory, could escape. I, however, preferred thinking up my own way each time, with quick improvised raids, as in running warfare, instead of the usual exhausting routine of trench warfare. I sublimated mercury into tiny drops, transformed sodium into chloride and identified it in the little hopper-shaped slabs under my microscope. Either way, here one's relationship with matter changed, became dialectical: a fencing bout, a match between two opponents. Two uneven opponents: on one side, with his queries, was the fledgling, defenseless chemist, with the textbook by Autenrieth, his only ally, by him (because Professor D., often called upon for help in difficult cases, kept scrupulously neutral, declining to give his opinion: a wise policy, because if someone gives an opinion he can make a mistake, and professors must never make mistakes). On the opposite side, with her enigmatic replies, was matter, deceptively passive, as old as time and with her incredible store of tricks, as solemn and subtle as the Sphinx. At that time I was just beginning to struggle with German, and I was enthralled with the word *Urstoff* (which literally means element, primary substance) and its prefix *Ur*, which expresses precisely ancient origin, remote distance in space and in time.

Here nobody had wasted many words warning us against acids, caustics, fires, and explosions; apparently, according to the tough ethics of the Institute, natural selection was relied on to pick out those of us who were the fittest for physical and professional survival. There were few hoods; in the course of systematic analysis each of us, following the prescriptions of our textbook, conscientiously released a great deal of hydrochloric acid and ammonia into the open air; therefore a thick snow-white mist of ammonium chloride hung permanently over the lab and deposited itself on

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the windowpanes in tiny sparkling crystals. The chamber for hydrogen sulphide, with its lethal atmosphere, was haunted by couples in search of seclusion and by a few odd individuals who ate their snacks there.

Through the gloom, and in the industrious silence, suddenly we heard a Piedmontese voice saying: "*Nuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus ferrum.*" It was March 1939; a few days earlier we had heard the nearly identical solemn announcement ("*Habemus Papam*") with which the conclave had dissolved and Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli had been admitted to the Seat of Peter. Many people placed their hopes in him, because you always have to hope in something or someone. The person who had uttered the blasphemy was Sandro, the quiet fellow.

Sandro was an outsider among us. He was a boy of medium height, thin and wiry; he never wore an overcoat, not even on the coldest days. He came to lectures wearing worn-out velvet knickerbockers, rough woollen knee-socks, and sometimes a short black cape which reminded me of the turn-of-the-century writer, Renato Fucini. He had big, rough hands, a bony, rugged profile; his face was baked by the sun and his forehead was low beneath his hair, which he wore very short, in a crew-cut. He walked with the long, deliberate stride of a farmer.

Anti-Semitic legislation had been passed a few months earlier, and I too was becoming an outsider. My Christian companions were polite people; none of them or any of the teachers had ever directed a hostile word or gesture at me, but I could feel them growing apart from me, and, following an ancient pattern, I was growing apart from them as well; every glance exchanged between them and me was accompanied by a tiny but perceptible flash of mistrust and suspicion. What do you think of me? What do I represent to you? The same as I did six months ago, an equal who just does not go to Mass, or the Jew who, according to Dante, "may not in your midst laugh at you"?

I had noticed, with amazement and joy, that something was beginning to grow between Sandro and me. It was not the friendship of two kindred people at all: on the contrary, the difference in our backgrounds made us rich in goods to exchange, like two merchants who meet having come from lands remote and unknown to each other. Neither was it the usual, wonderful confidence one has at twenty: I never achieved that with Sandro. I soon realized he was generous, subtle, persevering, and brave, with just a touch of recklessness: even so, he could be wild and elusive. Although we were at the age when people, out of need, instinct, and shamelessness, inflict on one another whatever is teeming in their heads and elsewhere (this age can last a long time, but ends with the first compromise), nothing had seeped through his shell of reserve, nothing of his inner world—which you could sense as rich and thriving—but a few rare, dramatically interrupted hints. He was like a cat, that you could live with for ten years without ever being allowed to penetrate its precious skin.

WE HAD a lot to give each other. I told him we were like a cation and an anion, but Sandro did not seem to grasp the comparison. He had been born on the beautiful, barren Serra d'Ivrea. He was the son of a bricklayer, and he spent his summers tending a flock—I don't mean a flock of souls, I mean a flock of sheep. He did this not because he was eccentric or full of airy-fairy Arcadian ideas, but because he was happy doing it, he did it out of love for the earth and grass, to which he was drawn. He had a strange flair for mimicry; whenever he talked about cows, hens, sheep, and dogs he was transformed, he imitated the way they looked at you, the way they moved and the sounds they made; he was happy and seemed to change himself into an animal, like a magician. He taught me about plants and animals, but told me little about his family. His father had died when he was a child. His folks were poor, simple people; since the lad was bright, they had decided to let him stay on at school so that he could bring some money into the house. He had agreed with typical Piedmontese resolve, but without enthusiasm. He had gone through the whole stretch of secondary school aiming at the highest marks with the least effort. He did not care about Catullus and Descartes, the important thing was to pass his exams and spend his Sundays skiing or climbing. He has chosen chemistry because it seemed better to him than any other course: it involved things you could see and touch; as a way of earning a living, it was less strenuous than being a carpenter or farmer.

We began to study physics together. Sandro was amazed when I tried to explain to him some of the confused ideas I had been developing at that time. That the nobility of man, attained in a hundred centuries of trial and error, consisted in his gaining power over matter, and that I had enrolled in chemistry because I wanted to remain faithful to this nobility. That to conquer matter is to understand it, and to understand it is necessary in order to understand the universe and ourselves: so Mendeleev's Periodic Table, which we were laboriously learning to unravel in those very weeks, was poetry, more noble and solemn than all the poems we had swallowed at school; come to think of it, it even rhymed! That, if he was looking for the bridge, the missing link between the world of paper and the world of real things, he did not have to look far, it was right there, in the Autenrieth textbook, in our smoky labs, and in our future work.

Finally, the most important thing: couldn't he, an honest, forthright boy, smell the sky-polluting stink of Fascist "truth"? Didn't he consider it shameful that a thinking man should be asked to believe without thinking? Did he not feel repul-

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sion for all dogmas, all unsubstantiated statements, all imperatives? He did feel it: how, then, could he help but sense a new dignity, a new majesty in our work—how could he fail to realize that the chemistry and the physics we were feeding on, besides being vital nourishment in themselves, were the antidote to Fascism he and I were looking for, because they were clear and could be checked at every stage, and they were not woven of lies and waffle like the radio and the newspapers?

Sandro listened to me with ironical attention, always ready to put me in my place with a couple of gentle, dry words whenever I overstepped into rhetoric; but something was maturing in him (certainly the merit was not all due to me: those were months full of fatal events), something that disturbed him because it was at the same time both new and old. Until that time he had read nothing but Salgari, London, and Kipling, but suddenly he became a madly avid reader: he assimilated and remembered everything, and everything shaped up in him spontaneously into a way of life. At the same time he began to study seriously, and his academic average shot up from C+ to A−. Out of unconscious gratitude, and possibly because he wanted to get his own back too, he, in his turn, began to take my education in hand, and he gave me to understand that it was lacking. I might well be right: matter might well be our teacher, and, for want of a better, even our political school. But he had a different matter, a different teacher, he wanted to show me: not the powders of qualitative analysis, but the true, authentic, timeless *Urstoff*: the rock and ice of the nearby mountains. He proved to me without difficulty that I was not qualified to talk about matter. How intimate, how familiar had I been up to then with the four elements of Empedocles? Did I know how to light a stove? How to wade through a stream? Had I experienced blizzards high up in the mountains? Did I know how seeds sprout? No: so he too had something vital to teach me.

Our comradeship was born, and it was the beginning of a frantic period for me. Sandro seemed to be made of iron, and ancient kinship bonds connected iron with him. The fathers of his fathers, he told me, had been tinkers and blacksmiths in the Canavese valleys. They used to make nails on their charcoal forges, and put red-hot irons on the wheels of carts; they used to hammer metal sheets until they were deafened by the sound of it; as for him, he felt as if he had found a long-lost friend whenever he spotted the red vein of iron in the peaks he climbed. In winter, whenever the need seized him, he would tie his skis onto his rusty bicycle, set off early, and pedal as far as the snow. He would not have any money, but just an artichoke in one pocket and the other full of lettuce; he would get back in the evening, or even the following day, having slept somewhere in a hayloft; the more he had starved and frozen in blizzards, the happier and healthier he was.

In summer, when he set off on his own, he often took his dog along to keep him company. The dog was a small, yellow, undignified-looking mongrel. Sandro told me, acting out the animal episode as usual, that as a puppy the dog had had an encounter with a cat. He had gone too close to the litter of newly-born kittens; the cat had taken umbrage, had begun to spit and arch her back, but the puppy had not yet learned the meaning of these warning signals and had stood there like a fool. The cat had attacked him, pursued and caught up with him, and scratched him on the nose: as a consequence, the dog had suffered a permanent trauma; he felt humiliated. So Sandro made him a rag ball, explained to him that it was a cat and gave it to him every morning, so that he might avenge himself of the insult on it and thus restore his canine honor. For this same therapeutic reason Sandro took him climbing for recreation. He used to tie him to one end of the rope and himself to the other, then leave the dog curled up on a ledge, while he started to climb. When the rope had run out, he used to pull him up gently; the dog soon learned the trick, and would climb with all four paws up against the nearly vertical face of rock, his nose turned upward, whining softly as if he were dreaming.

Sandro climbed more by instinct than by any technical knowledge, trusting the strength of his hands; when grasping a handhold, he addressed ironical greetings to the silicon, the calcium, and the magnesium he had learned to recognize in the mineralogy course. He considered his day wasted unless he had somehow or other used up his reserves of energy, and when he did so, his eyes became brighter. He explained to me that a sedentary life causes a layer of fat to grow behind the eyes, which is not healthy; when you exert yourself, the fat burns up and your eyes sink back into their sockets and become sharper.

He spoke about his own deeds with great reluctance. He did not (unlike me) belong to the category of people who do things for the sake of being able to talk about them: he was not fond of bragging, or actually of talking at all. It was as if, just as no one had taught him to climb, no one had taught him to speak, either; he did not express himself in the same way as anyone else, he only gave the gist of things.

When necessary, he could carry a rucksack weighing sixty pounds, but usually he went without: his pockets were enough for him, full—as I said—of vegetables, and with a piece of bread, a penknife, sometimes a dog-eared copy of the Alpine Club guidebook, and at all times a roll of wire for emergency repairs. He did not carry the guidebook around because he believed in it, but rather for the opposite reason. He dismissed it because he saw it as a burden, and furthermore as a bastard thing, a loathsome hybrid between snow and peaks on one side and paper on the other. He

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carried it on his climbs in order to scorn it; he was happy if he could find fault with it, even if that meant trouble for him and his fellow climbers. He could walk for two days without food, or eat three meals at one go and then set out. To him all seasons were suitable. In winter he would go skiing, but not to the well-equipped, fashionable resorts, which he avoided and laconically jeered at. As we were too poor to buy sealskins to put on our skis for uphill climbs, he had shown me how to sew together rough hempen cloths—Spartan contraptions which absorb water and then freeze like frozen cod—which we had to tie around our waists when running downhill. He dragged me along in exhausting slogs in fresh snow, far from any human signs, following itineraries which he seemed to know by instinct, like a savage. In summer we went from mountain hut to mountain hut, getting drunk with sunshine, exhaustion, and wind, scraping the skin of our fingertips on rock faces never before touched by human hands. But we never went on well-known peaks, nor did we seek memorable feats: he did not care about these things at all. The important thing for him was to find his own limitations, to test and strengthen himself; he also felt a mysterious need to prepare himself (and me) for coming times of iron, which were getting nearer month by month.

THE SIGHT of Sandro in the mountains reconciled me with the world and made me forget the nightmare which was hanging over Europe. He belonged there, he was made for them, just like the dormouse whose whistle and face he mimicked. In the mountains he lit up with silent, infectious happiness; with him I felt a new communion with the earth and sky. There my need for freedom merged with the peak of my strength and with the hunger to understand things that had led me to chemistry. At dawn, rubbing our eyes, we would go out through the little door of the Martinotti shelter; all around us, barely touched by the sun, the snowy and dark mountains seemed new, as if created in the night which had just gone by, and at the same time ageless. They were an island, another world.

Actually we did not always have to climb high and go a long way. In spring and autumn Sandro's haunts were the rock faces climbers trained on. There are quite a few of them, two or three hours' bicycle ride away from Turin, and I would really like to know whether people still use them: the Haystack Peaks with the Wolkmann Tower, the Teeth, *Roca Patanüa* (Naked Rock), *Plô*, *Sbarüa*, and others with plain, homely names. As to the last one, *Sbarüa*, I think it was discovered by Sandro himself, or by a mythical brother of his, whom Sandro never let me meet; but, from the rare hints he dropped, I gathered this brother was to Sandro what Sandro was to the rest of ordinary people. *Sbarüa* is a noun derived from the Piedmontese verb *sbarüé*, which means "to frighten": the peak itself is a prism of granite, about a hundred and twenty yards high, looming over a small hill bristling with brambles and copses. Just like Dante's Old Man of Crete, it is split all the way up by a crack which gets narrower and narrower as the climber goes up it, till he is forced to get out onto the face, where he actually "gets frightened." There at that time was a solitary nail, charitably left by Sandro's brother.

Those were peculiar places, where only a few dozen enthusiasts like us used to go; Sandro knew all of them, by name or by sight. We would go up, not without technical problems, amid the tiresome buzzing of bluebottles attracted by our sweat, climbing up faces of good sound rock, broken by grassy ledges covered with ferns or strawberries, and in autumn with blackberries. Occasionally we used little stunted tree trunks rooted in the cracks as handholds. After a few hours we would get to the summit, which, far from being a summit, was in most cases a peaceful meadow, where cows gazed at us indifferently. We then would get down in a few minutes to collect our bicycles, going at breakneck speed along paths scattered with old and fresh cow dung.

On other occasions we undertook more complicated climbs. There was no question of taking the easy way out: Sandro used to say that if we wanted to admire landscapes, we would have time to do that at forty. "Let's go, shall we?" he asked me—in dialect—one day in February. He meant that, as the weather was favorable, we could set out that evening for our winter climb of the Tooth of M., which we had been planning for some weeks. We slept at an inn and set out the following day, not too early, without knowing exactly what time it was—Sandro did not like watches and clocks, their quiet continuous warning seemed to him an arbitrary intrusion. We flung ourselves boldly into the mist, and emerged from it at around one o'clock, into dazzling sunshine. We were on the ridge of a peak which turned out to be the wrong one.

Then I said that we could go down about a hundred yards, cross at a point halfway up and continue our climb up the next ridge; or better still, since we were already there, we could go on climbing the wrong peak and make do with it—it was only about forty yards lower than the other one anyway. But Sandro, in magnificent bad faith, said in a few terse syllables that my second proposal was all right, but that then, "along the easy northwest ridge" (a sarcastic quote from the above-mentioned Alpine Club guidebook) we would reach the Tooth of M. in half an hour all the same; it was not worth being twenty, he added, if we couldn't afford the luxury of going up the wrong way.

The "easy ridge" might well have been easy, elementary in fact, in summer; we, however, found it uncomfortable going. The rock was wet on the sunny side and covered with black verglas on the

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dark side; between one crag and the next there were patches of soft snow where we sank up to our waists. We got to the top at five; I was staggering pitifully, and Sandro was seized by a fit of sinister laughter which I found irritating.

"How do we get down?"

"We'll see," he answered, and he added mysteriously, "The worst that can happen to us is that we'll have a taste of the wild." Well, we had that all right, in the course of that long night. We got down in two hours; we were hardly helped by our rope, which had frozen into a stiff, evil tangle which got hooked onto all the crags and rang on the rock like a cable. At seven o'clock we were on the shore of a small frozen lake, and it was dark. We ate the little that we had left, built an ineffective little wall of rubble on the side the wind was blowing from and lay down to sleep on the ground, huddled close together. It was as if time itself had frozen; every now and then we stood up to keep our circulation going, and it was always the same time; the wind was still blowing, there was still a ghost of a moon, still at the same place in the sky, and before the moon there was still the same wild cavalcade of ragged clouds. We had taken our boots off, just as they did in the books by Lammer which Sandro loved, and we kept our feet in our rucksacks. At the first, dismal light, which seemed to come from the snow rather than from the sky, we got up with our limbs stiff and our eyes wild from lack of sleep, hunger, and lying on the hard ground; we found our boots so frozen that they rang like bells, and we had to sit on them like brooding hens before we could put them on.

But we went back to the valley without any outside help. When the innkeeper, sniggering and looking askance at our drawn faces, asked us how we had got on, we cheekily replied that we had had an excellent climb, then paid the bill and left in a dignified manner. This was the taste of the wild. Now that many years have gone by, I regret having had so little of this taste, because, of all the good things life has given me, nothing has ever remotely resembled it: the taste of strength and freedom—freedom to make mistakes, too—and of being in charge of one's own destiny. Therefore I am grateful to Sandro for having consciously led me into trouble, on that escapade and others which were foolhardy only in appearance. I know for sure that they did help me later on.

THEY did not help him, or not for long. Sandro was Sandro Delmastro, the first to die of the Piedmont Resistance Commando Unit of the Action party. After a few extremely active months, in April 1944 he was captured by the Fascists. He did not give in and tried to escape from the Fascist headquarters in Cuneo. He was hit in the back of the neck by a burst of machine-gun fire, shot by a monstrous teen-aged assassin, one of those miserable fifteen-year-old borstal boys recruited by Mussolini's "Italian Social Republic." His body lay neglected for a long time in the middle of the street, because the Fascists had forbidden people to grant it burial.

Today I know that it is a hopeless task to clothe a man with words, to make him live again in writing—especially a man like Sandro. He was not a man one can tell stories about or build a monument to, he who used to laugh at monuments. He existed only in his actions. Now that they are over, nothing is left of him, nothing but, as I said, words.

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New York and/or Jerusalem

Robert Alter

THESE are indeed troubled times for Israelis pondering their national future and for those Jews of the Diaspora who think much about their relation to Israel. The shock waves set off by the Yom Kippur War and its political aftermath, in which Israel's essential isolation and vulnerability became so evident, are still reverberating. In many quarters there is an impulse to rethink old positions on the Jewish state. More than ever before, it seems Israel's exasperating fate to have to justify its national existence—unlike all the other nations of the earth, down to the shabbiest military oligarchy of murderous buffoons in the ex-colonial world. In America, as a gap has begun to emerge between conceivable American policy and Israel's vital security interests, or, again, between those interests and the commitments of many Jews on the Left to peace and freedom and the Third World forever, there are signs of growing ideological divisions among Jews. The results of the recent Israeli elections, moreover, could easily exacerbate such division. In Israel, of course, animosity between Right and Left, religious and secular, has always been the very air one breathed, but even such familiar contentiousness seems sharpened since 1973. The religious nationalists, having shown themselves more openly prepared than ever before to brandish the flaming sword of an uncompromising neo-messianism, are now part of the ruling coalition. In response to this new militancy since 1973, anti-annexationists on the secular Left like the writer A. B. Yehoshua have raised the old Zionist banner of "normalization," with all the radical rejection of religion as the vehicle of Jewish life which the slogan implies.

Hillel Halkin's *Letters to an American Jewish Friend: A Zionist's Polemic** is clearly a product of this whole post-1973 climate of malaise, something he himself actually admits when he observes near the beginning, "The war and its aftermath have frightened this country with a glimpse of its own mortality, and the country has not gotten over it." It is in the shadow of this intimation of mortality that Halkin frames his whole urgent argument with American Jewry, as the concluding section of the book, concentrating on Israel's political and demographic predicaments, makes perfectly explicit. Let me hasten to say that *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* is not merely a symptom of the historical moment but a vigorously active response to it, an intellectual event in its own right. It raises with an unusual quality of ruthless lucidity all the most fundamental issues about Jewish survival in the Diaspora and in Israel, and the implications of an allegiance to Israel on the part of Diaspora Jews. It is a book I think any Jew concerned with Israel and the future of the Jewish people ought to read. Precisely because it touches the very nerve centers of identity, loyalty, and ambivalence with which we live as Jews, this is a book that invites not so much a review as a response. First, however, some notion of the nature of the book and where it comes from is in order.

Hillel Halkin is an American now in his late thirties, raised in traditionally Jewish and Hebraist circles in New York, who emigrated from this country to Israel in 1970. He is an accomplished essayist,† and over the past ten years or so he has firmly established himself as the foremost English translator of modern Hebrew prose. *Letters* is his first book—very much, to judge by the way it reads, a book written in the white heat of passion as an encompassing *apologia pro vita sua judaica* and, because the personal here is inextricable from the ideological, as a vehement reformulation of the classic Zionist *shlilat ha-golah*, the negation or rejection of the Diaspora.

The peculiar form Halkin has chosen for his argument is both a major virtue and something of a technical problem. He makes his case for Zionism in six long letters to a hypothetical friend in New York, a younger contemporary who is an untypical American Jew in having a knowledge of Hebrew, a familiarity with Jewish culture, and a strong commitment to Jewish life, but who is typical in having chosen to relate to Israel personally as a tourist and nothing more. The contents of the friend's letters to Hillel Halkin have to be inferred almost entirely from what Halkin says in his own letters, though from time to time the correspondent from Israel resorts to the somewhat awkward but understandable strategy of quoting the friend's own statements back to him at length. Since, moreover, Halkin wants to storm all the

* Jewish Publication Society, 246 pp., $7.50.

† Among his essays in COMMENTARY are "Driving Toward Jerusalem" (January 1975), "Holy Land" (June 1974), "Zionism Revisited" (May 1973), and "Building Jerusalem" (September 1971).

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major positions defending life in the Diaspora, some readers may detect a certain slippage of identity in the friend from one letter to the next: from someone addicted to the cultural ethnicity of American Jewish life, to a George Steiner sort of ideologically universalist Diaspora intellectual, to someone flirting with the neo-pietism of the Jewish counterculture, to a post-Vietnam American liberal shrinking from the idea of armed conflict. But if when we read an epistolary novel we can make allowance for certain improbabilities of the form—like those voluminous letters the heroines of Samuel Richardson somehow manage to inscribe with the hot breath of the would-be rapist almost literally at their shoulder—we can surely forgive *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* a degree of awkwardness caused by the convention it has adopted.

The main point is that the friend's absent letters succeed in having, as the publisher's blurb quite rightly says, "a dialectical reality of their own"; and though Halkin clearly has to feel that he has conclusively won the debate, for he sees the position he is arguing as an absolutely inexorable historical truth, the friend is no mere straw man but an intelligent and stubborn antagonist. The epistolary form of the argument, then, seems to me to justify itself because, whatever its inconveniences, it is a vivid, compelling way of confronting the opposite sides of ambivalences, of bringing out the polemical nature of the author's Zionist position, of making every reader become the friend in America and thus wrestle with every turn of the debate. I should add that the epistolary form provides the writer a rhetorically appropriate means for articulating an ideological argument quite openly out of his total personal involvement in it. His wife and children, his home in the little town of Zichron Ya'akov, his onerous stretches of duty as a reservist near the Lebanese border, his lyric responses to the Israeli landscape in its seasonal changes, and his irritation with the abrasive shallowness of ordinary Israeli culture—all these not only make his argument a lively one but they also define a concrete context for it, give us a picture of what it means for him to live with the daily implications of his Zionist decision.

The personal involvement is crucial to the authenticity of the argument, for what Halkin, as an American who has chosen to settle in Israel, insists on is nothing less than an imperative obligation for all Jews who really care to be Jews to immigrate to Israel. Such a bald summary may make his position seem foolish, and even a detailed synopsis will hardly do justice to the force of his argument, for the book as it unfolds is a rhetorical *tour de force,* combining passionate conviction with considerable intellectual subtlety as it builds its case, step by step, with attention to historical, cultural, and political details. Without attempting, then, to recapitulate each stage of the argument, let me briefly sketch the general plan of attack.

Halkin's most basic contention, on which everything else he says ultimately depends, is that Diaspora Jewry is doomed, if not in the next generation or two, certainly within an easily foreseeable historical future. Before the emancipation, Jews in the various lands of their exile enjoyed a relatively stable, cohesive existence, despite their physical vulnerability. Group solidarity was guaranteed by their exclusivist religious faith which, with very rare exceptions, imposed formidable barriers between them and their Gentile neighbors. Socially and politically, they lived in enclaves that were allowed by the host nations to exercise considerable autonomy. In these circumstances, attrition was a peripheral phenomenon, and violence from without only an intermittent threat, though of course these communities were repeatedly subjected to extortion, humiliation, and expulsion.

All this has changed in the modern era. On the one hand, modern nationalism in its totalitarian forms has menaced the descendants of the ghetto dwellers with a systematic denial of basic human rights, including ultimately the right to live. In liberal democracies, on the other hand, Jews are naturally drawn from their Jewish parishes to the freedom of the larger environment, and without the compelling force of traditional faith, all their modern institutions, from reformed religion to communal organizations and the social rituals of ethnicity, must prove exercises in self-deception, unwitting way stations to assimilation or, in any case, rear-guard actions powerless to hold back assimilation's broad historical sweep. Halkin sums up this view in a metaphor:

> Modern Diaspora Jewry is a particularly volatile gas that is destined to suffer from a kind of Bernoulli's law: if not compressed from without, it will simply expand in all directions and disappear, while if pressure is applied to it, this will almost inevitably become so great as to cause a violent explosion. A relatively tolerable stasis of the medieval type—just enough pressure applied steadily enough at all points to hold the gas stably together—is no longer possible.

This should not suggest that Halkin rests his case merely on metaphorical ingenuity. The image of a Bernoulli's law occurs in a letter that is mainly devoted to marshaling statistics from a variety of recent demographic studies of Diaspora Jewry, and the numerical news is hardly encouraging. The Jewish birth rate in America is well below the replacement level; the rate of intermarriage has apparently been doubling and redoubling since the mid-50's, so that it is now considerably higher than the rate of intermarriage among the Jews of Weimar Germany. Given these facts, Halkin projects that the current American Jewish

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population of five million plus will be reduced by the end of the century to at most three million, of which perhaps a quarter will be identifiable as committed Jews. American Jewry then will be a much smaller group, without the capacity to sustain its own institutions, with much less political influence in a more populous America, and as this process of erosion continues, American Jewish life will diminish—one may infer, in the course of another century or so—to a vanishing point.

On the basis of this historical prognosis, Halkin argues that it is a form of bad faith to profess Jewish loyalty and yet remain in the Diaspora. Sensibly enough, he makes no attempt to convert those who make no such professions (they are hardly likely to read the book in any case). What he wants to do is to drive the Diaspora Jew who is concerned with Jewish survival to an awareness of the contradictions in not personally joining the Jewish national renascence on Jewish soil. "I am not saying," he makes clear in his second letter, "that you cannot live, if you try hard enough, an authentic Jewish life in the Diaspora; I am saying that if the criterion is the future of our people, you are living in the wrong place. And yet is not being in the wrong place in such a case itself a form of inauthenticity?" By the end of the last letter, the degree of diplomacy exercised here toward what Halkin clearly sees as the hypocrisy of the American friend's position is cast aside in favor of a stinging castigation couched in prophetic rhetoric:

> I have no quarrel with him who says plainly *not to be* and plainly lives by it; let him go his way and I will go mine; I wish him well and trust he wishes me no less. He who says *to be*, however, while refusing to act on it, concealing the *not* like a mortal pill beneath his tongue—for this kind of not letting the right hand know what the left hand is doing, I have quite lost patience.

Such an uncompromising attack on the contradictions of living as a Jew in the Diaspora rests on the premise that the Israeli *to be* can plausibly be construed as *to be Jews*, and some of Halkin's finest pages are his discussions of the potential in Israel for the development of a secular Jewish culture, no longer defined by Judaism as in the past yet preserving something of Judaism's cultural heritage. He begins the book with a characterization of Israel as a "community of faith"—the faith of Jews in the possibility of their sustaining a collective existence at this precarious intersection of geography and history, because there are no other possibilities, because this is the only hope for their survival as a people.

To be sure, Halkin's view of the actual state of Jewish culture in Israel is thoroughly unillusioned. In his fifth letter, he offers a shrewd and lively thumbnail cultural history of Palestinian Jewry in our century, arguing that at first ideology served the purposes of culture, but that the waves of mass immigration after the founding of the state swept away the fragile beginnings of a new Jewish culture which the early Zionists had fostered. By the third decade of statehood, it was clear that the cultural vacuum was being filled mainly with a debased eclecticism, an indiscriminate aping of foreign models encouraged by the international media to which an encircled Israel was all too attentively tuned. Nevertheless, Halkin contends that someone who can see Israeli society from an insider's viewpoint—unlike the French sociologist, Georges Friedmann, in *The End of the Jewish People?*—can perceive subtle bonds with the Jewish past and what Halkin tactfully calls "incipiencies" of a new Jewish cultural synthesis. The evidence presented for these incipiencies is chiefly, perhaps necessarily, anecdotal, but the case seems plausible enough, especially when one considers the difficulties involved in making a corresponding case that an authentic new Jewish culture is now developing in the Diaspora. Halkin's own perspective, however, while for the most part sharply focused on the Israeli scene, is in some respects drastically foreshortened for Jewish life in the Diaspora.

BEFORE we go on to the ambiguities of the cultural question, though, something should be said about the political thrust of Halkin's argument, for here, it seems to me, he entangles himself in the greatest contradictions. In his final letter, he casts a cold eye on the prospects for anything like genuine peace between Israel and the Arabs in our lifetime, and then he asserts that without a substantial transfusion of immigration, which means primarily from North American Jewry, Israel cannot in the long run survive. Now, the avowed aim of *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* is to plant in its readers a seed of doubt, unease, guilt about staying in the Diaspora. That much I think it will achieve for many readers, but it is surely quixotic to imagine that the seed will flower into a decision of *aliyah* for more than a handful. No instrument of persuasion, even so brilliant as this, is going to convince large numbers of American Jews to emigrate to Israel, barring, of course, a totally unforeseeable political catastrophe in this country. Given this fact, the hopeful urgency of Halkin's argument becomes a mask for apocalyptic bleakness: Diaspora Jewry is said to be doomed, and since massive immigration from America is extremely unlikely, Israel is in all probability doomed as well.

The kind of demographic projection, moreover, used to demonstrate the inevitable withering of the Diaspora unfortunately could be used just as easily to demonstrate the inevitable disappearance of a Jewish state in the Middle East. For even if we were to grant Halkin an annual immigration from America of fifteen or thirty thousand, even-

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tually this source of new human material would dry up, with few Jews left in America except those who had chosen not to be Jews, and at that point the Israelis would still be a small minority, with a relatively anemic birth rate, in a vast sea of Arabs, a growing group of them within the borders of Israel itself. If one follows the terms of this analysis, the great influx from America would have only bought the Jewish state a few decades of breathing space before the process of its ineluctable dissolution were resumed. The point is that the Jews cannot win a historical numbers game, no matter how it is set up, and indeed never have won such games during three-and-a-half millennia of improbable persistence. In any global perspective, they are a tiny people that is bound to get tinier in proportion to mankind at large; and while numbers have political implications, I do not believe that survival will be guaranteed if in the year 2000 there are six million Jews in Israel instead of a projected four million, or that American Jewry will be doomed if by then its population is three million instead of five or six million. Jewish peoplehood must have a toughness and Jewish culture a resilience that do not depend on such numerical scales, and in this essential respect there may possibly be more grounds for hope than Halkin's analysis suggests, not only in regard to Israel but in regard to the Diaspora as well.

There is, in any case, something ultimately and oddly unpolitical about the way Halkin tacitly equates the problem of national regeneration with the problem of survival. This, more than anything else he says, is classic Zionism with a vengeance: the belief that it is chiefly within the power of the Jewish people itself, by a process of courageous *inner* transformation, to determine its historical destiny. That might conceivably have been a plausible view in 1900—though perhaps even then a careful scrutiny of developing world politics might have raised certain questions—but after 1973, with the ominous international constellation that has arrayed itself against Israel, such a notion is no more than the poignant, painfully quixotic, vestige of an outmoded faith.

I HAVE spoken of a quality of ruthless lucidity in *Letters to an American Jewish Friend*. There are times, however, especially in relation to the psychology and cultural dynamics of life in the Diaspora, when it becomes a hyper-lucidity, like a pair of overcorrected spectacles that focuses distant objects telescopically but at the cost of distorting the whole field of vision. This is a bracingly anti-apologetic book, which again and again cuts through the cant of self-serving Jewish pretense: about the resplendent ethical heritage of the Jews, the supposed universalism of the Jewish vision, the intellectuality of the Jewish tradition, the feasibility of converting classic Jewish religion into modern liberal doctrine. (Characteristic in manner and perception is his comment on a remark of Voltaire's that "the Hebrew Bible is the most infamous chronicle ever written of atrocities perpetrated by a people on its neighbors"—to which Halkin replies, "While I would not exchange one chapter of the Bible for all the writings of Voltaire, its record of our dealings with the natives of Canaan is not, when judged by the standards of the anti-Vietnam movement, an admirable one.") But the problem with the wonderful sharpness of this anti-apologetic outlook is, as I have just intimated, its tendency to overcorrection. Halkin's uncompromising formulations often have a tonic effect, but they also eliminate at certain crucial junctures the nuanced variety and complexity of the historical phenomena they purport to define.

His dismissal of religion is a case in point. He sees Reform and Conservative Judaism as pure reflexes of assimilation, riddled with contradictions, from their origins in 19th-century Germany to their mimicry of the forms and manners of American Protestantism today. The new experiential Judaism of the *havurot* and related groups he sees as a parallel mimicking among the fashion-conscious young of the rituals and folkways of the counterculture, a quest for elevated moments that has nothing to do with the recognition of historical Judaism as a binding system of belief. For him, Orthodoxy alone has authenticity, but it is the authenticity of an anachronism, preserving itself only by averting its vision from the most imperative aspects of modernity, and so its historical fate will be gradually to fade away in the slow dawning of the Jewish secular future.

This either-or thinking about religious options strikes me as the mental habit of someone who, as Halkin confesses of himself, has suffered an adolescent bout of vehement Orthodoxy followed by an equally vehement rebellion against religion. This is by no means to dismiss all the items in his indictment of American Judaism. Jews on this continent have surely created a three-ring circus of spurious religion unprecedented in the history of our people, at least in variety and magnitude, from the thunderous organs of the great mausoleum-temples to the *dernier cri* of the new guitar-slinging cantors, and one can easily share Halkin's skepticism as to whether any of this holds much hope for the Jewish future. But the prevalence of ersatz institutions in a confusing era of historical transition hardly implies that all forms of non-Orthodox Judaism are inauthentic, or that all religious options for the future have been closed out. There are, after all, synagogues in this country that have managed over the years to serve as powerful centers for Jewish loyalty and cultural cohesiveness, and I think it would be presumptuous to conclude that they were not also, at least for some of their members, vehicles of genuine Jewish religious needs. If, as Halkin notes, there has been a

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drop in synagogue membership in recent years, at least one reason is that some American Jews have become disillusioned with the huge synagogues established in the post-World War II building craze, and there are increasing experiments with small prayer quorums, home study-groups, and the like, as viable alternatives to institutional gigantism.

As for Orthodoxy, one might at least speculate that, in the long historical perspective, its fate will be not to shrink as an internally coherent anachronism (though that is the likely future of one of its wings) but to open out toward modernity, gradually modifying the more rigid premises of its world view, and responding honestly to the most disturbing challenges of the modern condition; this is at any rate a possibility suggested by the occasional manifestations of constructive openness among Orthodox thinkers. I would not dispute Halkin's notion that we have crossed a historical watershed, and that religion will no longer be the embracing framework of Jewish existence. What I am proposing is that for the imaginable future Judaism, and not only the holding operations of fundamentalist Orthodoxy, will continue to be a live option which may be elected by members of the larger entity we call the Jewish people; and that Jewish secular culture will therefore have to enter into a dialectic not only with the legacy of a distant past but with a continuing religious alternative.

To generalize from the conceptual difficulty reflected in Halkin's treatment of the religious question, I think he leaves little room for necessary ambiguities when he is discussing historical issues or their consequences in the cultural politics of the present. Thus, in his assault on the various modernizing apologists of the Jewish heritage, he tends to insist on an absolute cleavage between the particularism of Jewish existence and universalist values, between the imperious self-interest of the Jews and ethical concerns, between the authoritarianism of a revealed religion and the fostering of intellectuality. This sort of cleavage can be maintained, I think, only through repeated exaggeration, or by blurring the key terms of distinction. It is, for example, a misleading simplification to claim, as Halkin does, that because ethics addresses itself to man *qua* man, it is "what makes a Jew like anyone else" and so it "cannot also be what makes him a Jew." By such syllogisms, in which both the major and the minor premise are questionable, he can conclude that there is no Jewish ethical heritage, no way to talk about ethical values as a component of Jewish identity. Or again, it is very well to remind us that classical Judaism exhibits a pronounced bias against empirical science and philosophical inquiry, but this hardly means that traditional Jewish culture, as is contended here, is *anti*-intellectual, for the obvious reason that there are other forms of intellectuality, as (to cite the most evident instance) two millennia of exegesis and legal dialectics attest.

The question of the historical Diaspora communities' relation to the cultures around them is the most crucial instance of this fondness for schematic distinctions, because the either-or view of assimilation or *aliyah* ultimately depends on it. Halkin repeatedly insists on an unyielding separatism as a cultural axiom of the traditional Diaspora. It was because Jews fiercely entrenched themselves in their own communities, turning their backs on the blandishments of the Gentile world, that they were able to preserve their identity as a people. It then follows that where free interchange between Gentile and Jew is the norm, the Jews cannot possibly persist as a distinctive group, and from now on can so persist exclusively within the borders of their own state. As elsewhere, there is considerable justice in Halkin's historical observations, but, as elsewhere, they are overstated. If the Jews were in many respects rigid separatists, they also exhibited, throughout the lands of their exile, an absolute genius for assimilation, as the late Israeli historian, Yehezkel Kaufmann, showed long ago in his great synoptic study, *Golah v'Neikhar* ("In Exile and Alien Land"); but one would be hard put to guess how this mysterious osmosis took place from Halkin's notion of a hermetically sealed Diaspora world.

What he says about the occasional exception to the rule of separatism reflects with special vividness the polemical slant of his view of Jewish history. Invoking the great secular Hebrew poetry of the Golden Age in Spain, he expresses his keen admiration for

> what these men tried to do, for their determination to widen as *passionately loyal Jews* the frontiers of Jewish experience, so that all of life, and not just that circumscribed part of it sanctioned by rabbinic authority, might be included within them. And again in Renaissance Italy, or most extraordinarily of all perhaps, in that 17th-century explosion of pent-up Jewish energies known as Sabbatianism. Yet each of these efforts ultimately failed, since the Jewish community, under . . . rabbinical leadership, sooner or later closed ranks against them: each time the partial secularizers were either forced back into the fold or driven away from it entirely—and each time Jewish life remained as constricted as ever in the end.

This is one of a number of historical generalizations in the book that have an air of plausibility but which happen to be wrong in most of the particulars. It is a plain confusion to bracket Sabbatianism, an antinomian movement of ecstatic messianism and the very antithesis of secularism or of "creative assimilation," with the renascence of a secular literature in Hebrew that drew on Arabic and, later, Italian models. After the apostasy of

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Sabbatai Zevi, Sabbatianism, as the most powerful movement of mass heresy post-exilic Jewry had ever known, was ruthlessly suppressed by rabbinic authorities. Nothing like the fate of the Sabbatians was ever suffered by the proponents of the new Hebrew poetry and imaginative fiction. The secular literature had its frequent and at times vehement detractors in the religious establishment, but the "closing of ranks" as a suppression of heresy which Halkin's language suggests never really occurred. This movement, which began in Andalusia in the last decades of the 10th century, not only produced an astonishing series of masterpieces in the first century and a half of its existence, but also managed to establish itself so firmly that it continued to flourish as a coherent, developing tradition in Christian Spain, Portugal, Provence, down into Italy and Holland. In fact, the later stages of the movement were not at all a matter of "again in Italy," with the implication of one brief episode followed by another after a long interim, but of *still* in Italy—a hardy continuity that is lucidly described by the Israeli scholar, Dan Pagis, in his major new book, *Hiddush uMasoret b'Shirat ha-Hol* ("Innovation and Tradition in Secular Hebrew Poetry").

These eight centuries of continuous literary activity, from the Hebrew adaptation of Arabic poetic forms through the implanting of the sonnet in Hebrew—quite symptomatically, the very first language after Italian in which sonnets were written anywhere!—of course do not refute the general idea of separatism and anti-secularism as recurrent features of Jewish history. And one must concede that the movement only embraced certain classes within one large geo-cultural sector of world Jewry. Nevertheless, the whole phenomenon does suggest that the possibilities for culturally productive interaction with the Gentile environment may have been at least somewhat more abundant, various, and persistent than Halkin allows.

One may recognize the cogency of his contention that, after all, there is a yawning gap between our situation and that of pre-modern Jews, for whatever experiments in cultural assimilation and cultural competition they undertook, they stood on the secure base of a coherent community held together by a common faith and governed by its own recognized authorities. There is certainly no warrant for placid confidence that the bearers of Jewish culture outside the borders of Israel will not be dissipated in the course of time like those particles of gas in a Bernoulli reaction. But the fact that there was historically a good deal more continuous cultural interchange between the Jews and their surroundings than Halkin suggests, that, in other words, Jews in many places actually lived with some degree of tension between two cultural identities, indicates that the precarious enterprise of modern Jewry is neither totally unprecedented nor absolutely unfeasible. (At one point in *Letters,* the friend is chided for "lack[ing] the passion to live without contradiction," but perhaps many Jews through the ages have had a peculiar passion for embracing disparate worlds that enabled them to live with contradiction.) Though the Diaspora, moreover, now lacks the strong cement of traditional faith, it has, to balance in part that loss, a real political center, the reborn Jewish state, in which the classic national language has been revived and where the post-religious idea of peoplehood as the primary mode of Jewish existence has been given palpable historical substance.

THE chief ideological correlate of Halkin's either-or thinking both about Jewish history and about options for the future is his unqualified adherence to the old Zionist ideal of normalization. If there is no prospect for a viable Judaism in the modern era, if there is no real Jewish ethical tradition or universalist impulse, and if existence in the Diaspora is an impossible contradiction, Jews should be thoroughly content to become nothing more than the nationals of a Lilliputian state in an obscure little corner of geography. The only consistent and healthy position, Halkin contends, is to be *k'khol ha-goyim,* like all the nations:

> If we had as much true culture in this country as the Albanians or Finns, the Guatemalans or the Greeks, I would say *dayenu* too. As if it were a little thing to be, like them, a people with a sure sense of itself, living, as Zionism envisioned us doing, a healthy national existence on its land!

This celebration of the health of the Finns strikes me as a moment when the anti-apologetic stance slips into the familiar netherworld of Jewish inferiority complexes. The imitative and meretricious features of Israeli culture are quite rightly deplored, but there is a certain perversity in Halkin's very literal insistence that Israel as yet has no culture at all, and that, concomitantly, the supposed cultural wholeness of the Guatemalans and the Greeks is an ideal to which Israel might aspire. Indeed, one might wonder whether not only the Israelis but even the Jews of the Diaspora—whatever the ambiguities of their situation—do not have a culture with a breadth and vitality hardly in evidence in the sleepy provinces of Central America or the Balkan boondocks that Halkin proposes for emulation. In the last letter of this book, the friend is made to say that his Zionist correspondent has won a Pyrrhic victory, leaving "scorched earth" behind because he has destroyed all the bases for a sense of uniqueness or grandness in Jewish history. Halkin's answer is a long, elaborate parable about koala bears threatened with extinction who can only survive in a particular eucalpytus forest and who want nothing more from the world than to be allowed to go on being koala bears. The parable is an utterly charming narra-

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tive invention, but it is no real answer to the friend, who wants to know if after all these centuries and peaks of achievement the Jewish people must acquiesce in being nothing more than an Albania with *houmos* and *hamsins*.

Nowhere is it clearer than in this stress on normalization that ideology makes what it wants of history rather than responding to what is actually going on in history. The reasons for the ideal of normalization in early Zionist thought are evident enough, but three decades of statehood, these last ten years especially, have demonstrated how unnormal a people the Jews continue to be—and need to continue to be, for intrinsic reasons as well as those of political necessity. Historically, the Jews have been passionate particularists and at the same time a world people, with a changing experience of the cultures of the world, and, by the logic of their spiritual heritage, with a universalist light at the end of their particularist tunnel vision. In our present circumstances, if Israel, on the one hand, serves as a centripetal force of Jewish national consciousness for the Diaspora, it is true conversely that the multiple links of Israel with Jews elsewhere mean that the Diaspora helps connect the Jews of Israel with the world, in complicated, often ambiguous, and potentially productive ways not available to the hapless Albanians. Israelis in general, if one may judge by many of their intellectual spokesmen, seem far less ready than Halkin to surrender this anomaly of extended cultural identity by entirely dismantling the Diaspora.

I SUPPOSE there is an ironic appropriateness in the fact that we are impelled as Jews to debate now the burning issues of 1900, which may again be the most crucial issues of the year 2000, if by then the physical threat to Israel has receded. For the moment, the more immediately urgent question is the brutal politics of national survival, not the definition of national revival, and though the latter cannot for a moment be forgotten, it would be a mistake to confuse the two, or to suggest that one held the key to the other.

In any case, Hillel Halkin has done a remarkable job of restating the classic Zionist position with great dialectical sharpness and with a terrific impetus of personal conviction. One may quarrel with some of his assumptions or some of his interpretations of the past, but this is a book that has to be confronted, not just read. At this moment of ideological unrest and realignment, *Letters to an American Jewish Friend* articulates a clear, forceful polemic that will drive every reader back to a careful scrutiny of his own preconceptions about Jewish existence, and for that achievement we can be grateful.

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American Jews: Still a Distinctive Group

Charles S. Liebman

"As does the Christian so does the Jew." This insight into the social behavior of modern Jews, which we owe to the poet Heinrich Heine, has become something of a sociological axiom, in particular for students of American Jewry. Thus, Seymour Martin Lipset, in an important and frequently cited article,* speaks of the propensity of Jews to accommodate "to the dominant behavior patterns within the Gentile community," to the extent that Jews constitute "the *most* American of all groups in the nation [and] exhibit the predominant American traits in a more integrated fashion than any other group." The thesis that American Jewish behavior is best understood as the conscious or unconscious adjustment of institutions and behavior patterns to those of American culture at large has been reiterated frequently in recent years; and a new book by Joseph Blau, *Judaism in America*,† enshrines it as almost a matter of sociological law.

The "accommodationist" thesis is of course based on socio-historical analysis, but it may also serve as an ideological weapon, and on two opposing sides. Those who object to Jewish efforts at maintaining separate institutions, or are embarrassed by distinctive patterns of Jewish religious practice which deviate from accepted norms of American behavior, may take a certain comfort in a theory which suggests that Jewish particularism is abnormal not only by American standards but according to Jewish historical experience in America as well. An "accommodationist" thesis thus reinforces the position that Jews ought to be more American and that those Jews who *are* more American stand within the main line, as opposed to recent immigrants, or "separatist" Jews, or Jewish "extremists" who seek to develop patterns of behavior and institutional structures which offer barriers to full Jewish integration into American culture and society. On the other side are those who find in the "accommodationist" thesis confirmation of their view that since American Jews are coming increasingly to reflect the Gentile environment, they will cease to exist as a distinguishable group. As this is a virtually inevitable process, such people argue, it is pointless to continue to support efforts at maintaining an independent Jewish existence in the Diaspora; those who want to survive as Jews must move to Israel.

But whatever the ideological implications of the "accommodationist" thesis, a prior question needs to be asked about it: is it correct? Obviously, in the most basic sense, it is. American Judaism *does* bear the impact of the American experience in many significant ways, and the same rule applies to every Jewish community in history, from the time of the Bible onward. The biblical narrative abounds in examples of the way the surrounding culture affected the masses of Jews and scholars have noted its role in the formulation of normative Jewish concepts of God, man, and the cosmos. Not that one can account for the development of ancient Judaism by recourse to its environment alone, but neither can one understand Jewish uniqueness until one has understood how the Jews reformulated and reshaped the myths and rites of Near Eastern civilization. And what holds for the biblical era holds as well for later Jewish history, even for those periods during the long sojourn in medieval Europe when Jews seem to have formed a completely isolated and self-contained community.

The critical question is not whether Jews have historically adapted themselves to the surrounding culture—this is a self-evidently true proposition. The question is which elements of that culture have they simply assimilated and adopted without change, which elements have they transformed in the process of absorbing them, which elements have they resisted, and which important elements, if any, have they ignored? This is an empirical question, one that must be approached in strict objectivity and which requires careful attention to the proper definition of terms, bearing in mind their potential ideological component. For instance, was the development of Jewish fraternal lodges in the 19th century, with their secret ceremonials and rites, a symptom of accommodation to urban middle-class norms, or a transformation of those norms into terms appropriate to Jews? The answer one gives to this question may depend not only on what one sees as essential and what as peripheral in Jewish history, but also on whether one is anxious to make a case for the propensity of Jews to assimilate or a case for their capacity to survive. The same applies to instances of Jewish behavior that straddle the line between accommodation and resistance to the environment.

All these distinctions, hard to make under any circumstances, are especially blurred when it comes to Jewish behavior in America. In

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* "The American Jewish Community in a Comparative Context," in Peter I. Rose, ed., *The Ghetto and Beyond* (1969).

† University of Chicago Press (1976).

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the first place, America is an open society and does not impose its culture on its citizens in the way that France does on Frenchmen, England on Englishmen, or, for that matter, Israel on Israelis. Secondly, American culture is highly differentiated, and its regional, ethnic, and religious variety provides "space" for a host of cultural subvarieties. This also accounts for the fact that Americans are less attentive to deviances which might be intolerable in a more uniform culture. Thirdly, the geographic concentration of Jews in the United States affords them an opportunity for mutual reinforcement and acts as a screen against the larger culture, whose impact might otherwise be felt more intensely. Fourthly, the relatively advanced position of Jews in American society enables them to exercise an influence of their own on the larger culture. The American attitude toward minorities, the American brand of political liberalism, even the very concept of cultural pluralism, owe important debts to Jews. Finally, secularism in America is not, as it historically has been elsewhere, a creed or a self-conscious movement in and of itself, and it does not provide a separate focus of identity. This means that Judaism and Jews are under less pressure to conform to forces which in other societies they have embraced.

Still, the fact that America offers a more fluid environment does not mean that the Jewish reaction to that environment cannot be observed and assessed. In what follows, and as an explicit challenge to the reigning theory of Jewish behavior in America—the theory which stresses the element of accommodation and adaptation rather than the element of resistance or transvaluation—I want to suggest that there have been in the past, and there are today, currents in American life that have had virtually *no* impact on Jews, that important areas of Jewish life have remained untouched by American culture. Four such areas strike me as being of special significance.

Peoplehood. In the 18th and 19th centuries, under the pressure of Western conceptions of nationality and the nation-state, Jews reformulated their age-old definition of themselves as a people and paid lip-service, and sometimes a good deal more than lip-service, to the idea that they constituted nothing but a religious faith. In America, the 1885 "Pittsburgh Platform" of Reform Judaism proclaimed: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community."

Yet despite all this, and despite the fact that there is nothing in American culture which supports the sense of identification, kinship, and responsibility that American Jews feel toward other Jews throughout the world, that sense has been particularly salient in the consciousness of American Jewry. It was the Damascus blood libel in 1840 that led to the first concerted action by Jews throughout the country, and the Mortara affair in Italy in 1858 that sparked the establishment of the first Jewish umbrella organization in the United States, the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. The "Pittsburgh Platform" aside, wealthy "uptown" Reform Jews openly expressed their concern for the persecuted Jews of Russia and Rumania, helped them when they arrived in the United States, and even interceded with the American government in their behalf in a manner unparalleled by any other religious group. Most remarkable was the support given by those same Reform Jews to Jewish settlement in Palestine, and their efforts to create and assist Jewish communities in the Soviet Union.

The wealthy Reform philanthropists who bore the burden of support for both these projects were neither Zionists nor Bolsheviks—indeed, they were outspoken antagonists of the Zionists, and we may assume that they felt no less kindly disposed to the revolutionary regime of the Soviet Union in the 1920's—and at the time these projects were being fostered, the 1920's, Jews had good reason to fear the growth of anti-Semitism in the United States. Yet despite every consequence and implication, and despite the absence of cultural "legitimacy" for their activity, wealthy Reform philanthropists continued to support Jews in need.*

This is not to say that no one had reservations about support for Soviet or Palestinian Jews, or that no one felt any conflict between such activity and "proper" American behavior. Rather, the value of Jewish peoplehood overrode, even in the case of these highly Americanized Jewish philanthropists, their otherwise sober calculations of American social reality and what accorded with it.

Voluntaryism. Joseph Blau, in *Judaism in America,* borrows the term "voluntaryism" from the sociologist Sidney Mead and finds that it is a "pervasive trait" in American cultural life which has shaped American Judaism. "Voluntaryism" rests on the belief that an individual's rights take precedence over the rights of society, and his duties to himself over his duties to society. Blau argues that "voluntaryism," to the American Jew, means that "a man's religious affiliations are his own concerns and not the business of the community. . . ." Hence, not only is the civil status of the Jew independent of his religious ties but the Jew is "completely independent of synagogue control." Moreover, Blau implies, "voluntaryism" extends as well to the Jew's ties to the organized Jewish community itself.

Now there is no doubt that "voluntaryism" is a pervasive trait in American culture at large, yet the fact is that Jews are in some ways indifferent to it. Contrary to what one might have expected from a community anxious to accommodate to American norms, contemporary American Jews increasingly express their Jewishness outside their homes and outside their private lives, at the public, communal level.

Daniel J. Elazar, in his recent book, *Community and Polity,*† highlights the emergence of Jewish federations of philanthropy and welfare funds as central instruments of the Jewish community. They, in turn, are "dominated by

* See Barbara W. Tuchman, "The Assimilationist Dilemma: Ambassador Morgenthau's Story," COMMENTARY, May 1977, for more on this.

† Jewish Publication Society (1976).

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people who are involved in the total life of the community and who therefore tend to see its problems from a perspective based on a conception of the community as a whole." The federations have increasingly strengthened their position vis-à-vis other Jewish institutions and have undertaken broad communal planning and even a measure of communal control. The very principle behind Jewish federations, the principle that the individual Jew should make his philanthropic contribution to a central agency which then allocates the sums to local, national, and overseas institutions, contravenes the principle of "voluntaryism," according to which the individual should contribute directly to those organizations and institutions for which he has a special affinity. Finally, whether a Jew does or does not support a federation is very much a matter of communal concern. Indeed, the community exercises every means it can to elicit contributions from Jews, imposing its collective choices on its constituent members in as non-"voluntaryistic" a manner as the law permits.

Organized Religion. It is generally agreed that organized religion no longer addresses itself to man's deepest spiritual needs and has come to play a secondary role in his life. As Bryan Wilson, the British sociologist of religion, has pointed out, lower rates of church attendance reflect the declining capacity of the church "to summon the loyalties and donations of the laity." Once, says Wilson, organized religion "legitimated the moral and social order, . . . mediated relationships of authority, helped balance social control and self-restraint, provided a moral order colored with myth to rationalize local action in cosmic terms, and reinforced group solidarity with imposed ritual practice." Now it has become "inconsequential." Wilson acknowledges that some of the recently imported Third World religions (he might well have added sectarian and fundamentalist varieties of Christianity) *are* taken seriously by their adherents, but, he argues, while they offer private and personal systems of meaning, these new forms of faith have little to say to the larger social order. They do not represent culture, "but just a congeries of options in a plural society—a diverse set of options 'out.'" Given the position of Jews in American society, they might well be expected to follow the pattern of the declining church outlined by Wilson.

Let us concede at the outset that the synagogue in America plays a less central role in Jewish life than it did twenty years ago. The increased attention devoted to Israel and Soviet Jewry has contributed to a rise in importance of institutions and individuals best able to organize the Jewish community at the philanthropic and political level. But in its relation to these institutions, the synagogue fulfills precisely that function which Wilson says the church no longer fulfills; it supports the Jewish social order, reinforces group solidarity with imposed ritual practice, and provides a moral order colored with myth which rationalizes local action in cosmic terms.

Moreover, "secular" Jewish institutions, far from offering a threat to the authority of the synagogue (as many rabbis believed they would), tend to exhibit great sensitivity toward Jewish religious life and great respect for Jewish religious values. Jewish communal activity, particularly among younger people, often leads to a search for the spiritual meaning of Judaism. The sense of peoplehood, though not the same thing as a religious sensibility, can and often does conduce to the awakening of such a sensibility. Though the current upsurge in ethnic consciousness in America, by which many Jews have been affected, may be understood at one level as a symptom of religious decline, with ties to the group taking the place of ties to the church, the American Jewish sense of kinship and peoplehood (as we have seen) is in fact a constant in American Jewish history, one which is as likely to lead to a greater affinity for the religious aspects of Judaism as it is to act as a surrogate for religious affiliation.

Religious Observance. This final point emerges directly from the previous one.

The prevalent notion in American life is that a "religious" person is someone who behaves morally. As Joseph Blau puts it, the thrust of contemporary Protestantism (the new upsurge of evangelism notwithstanding) is to evaluate conduct "in terms of the relations of man to man alone, without regard to ulterior considerations of the relations of man to God." According to Blau, "except to professional theologians, the distinction between morality and religion is today unimportant, and virtually nonexistent." Moralism, the stress on universal standards of ethical behavior as opposed to particularistic standards of proper ritual practice and faith, dominates the religious culture of America, especially that part of the religious culture in which American Jews make their own lives.

Yet moralism as a religious idea is not very helpful in understanding contemporary American Judaism. It is true that in a random sample of American Jews one is likely to find relatively low levels of religious observance. Large numbers of Jews, perhaps a majority of American Jews, are indifferent to the demands of the Jewish tradition and far more attuned to the cultural standards of urban, middle-class America. (To some degree they even create those standards.) But these Jews do not set *Jewish* standards, nor do they pretend to. They neither control Jewish institutions and communal organizations nor dictate the norms of American Jewish behavior.

In Jewish life today, Reform no less than Orthodox, and in the communal agencies no less than in the synagogues, the tendency has been increasingly toward placing the emphasis on observance, ritual behavior, and cultic practice. This is decidedly a new development in American Jewish life. Thirty or forty years ago, even twenty years ago, the communal leadership of American Jewry, including large sectors of the rabbinate itself, were considerably less concerned with Jewish ritual and tradition than is the case today, when rabbis, synagogues, and Jewish communal institutions of all types are more sensitive to the demands of traditional

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religious observance. It may be that this development signifies a growing polarity among those nominally identified as Jews. It may even be that assimilation has eaten so deeply into the community that only the committed remain, although this is extremely doubtful. But whatever the development portends, what is significant about it for our present discussion is that it cannot in any way be accounted for by the "accommodationist" thesis of Jewish life.

THE impact of America on American Judaism, then, is not so simple or so unambiguous as has sometimes been maintained. American Jews have done more than accommodate themselves to their environment. They have not only transformed that environment in some instances, and resisted it in others, but have even remained utterly indifferent to it in areas that touch their deepest concerns and values as Jews. And therein, perhaps, lies some basis for a continued hope for distinctive Jewish survival.

Fiction

History Into Art

John Romano

"ONE January afternoon in the year 1941, a German soldier was out walking, enjoying an afternoon's liberty, when he found himself wandering alone, through the San Lorenzo district of Rome." So begins Elsa Morante's *History: A Novel.** History at its ugliest looms behind the presence of a German soldier in Italy in 1941: the Rome-Berlin Axis, the Fascist alliance just then engaged in defending annexed territories in Greece and North Africa. In fact, this very soldier belongs to a unit that is headed for Africa to help the Italians against the British.

But all this is left unsaid for the moment. We learn instead that the soldier's name is Gunther, that he is barely old enough for military service, that he is tall for his age, and that before the war he lived with his widowed mother and brothers in a little town in Bavaria. This afternoon he has some wine in a tavern where the men are unfriendly—Germans "are not popular in certain working-class areas"—and finds that he is drunk. He wanders at random into a doorway, and soon is face to face with a woman whose name is Ida Mancuso. Speaking only four words of Italian, he is at a loss. "She, however, seeing him confront her, stared at him with an absolutely inhuman gaze, as if confronted by the true and recognizable face of horror." Here the narrative breaks off, for we need fifty pages, the story of the woman's life until that moment, in order to comprehend the horror in her gaze.

The interruption of the story, the backpedaling to Ida's childhood, through the furious personal momentum of her wants, dreams, and fears, until we arrive again at that silent confrontation on the brink of her rape—this shattered form of narration shows Elsa Morante's central faith as a novelist: that behind every human encounter, every turn in our lives, there is a pressure of historical reality, intimate psychic preparations, a universe of relevant detail. This is the first novel by Miss Morante to appear in America since *Arturo's Island* (1959), and it does much to account for the very high reputation of her work in Europe. She was for a while the wife of Alberto Moravia, and is associated with the Italian cultural Left. But her realistic, humane, and inexpressibly affecting novels have little in common with the sleek, despairing coolness of such artists as Moravia, the poet Eugenio Montale, or the film-maker Bernardo Bertolucci.

History: A Novel is set in Rome during the war and just after. It is the story of Ida Mancuso, her two sons, and the people near to them in poor neighborhoods, refugee shelters, and the cadre of Resistance fighters to which the elder son belongs. To foreign observers, this is the world of neo-realist Italian cinema: Rossellini's *Open City*. To the Roman masses, it was the blasted, shabby, nearly hopeless actuality of long years. Though all

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* Translated by William Weaver, Knopf, 555 pp., $10.95.

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the world, nearly, shared in the suffering of the war, it was perhaps in Italy that its chaos most abounded.

Miss Morante takes that chaos upon herself and declares that to grasp the immense public suffering one must look closely at the infinity of private circumstances in which it took place. So, to "unpack" the look on Ida's face, we learn that Ida's mother was a Jew from Venice; that her father, gentle and loving, was an anarchist from Calabria; and that as a child Ida suffered from mild epilepsy. We follow her to Rome with her husband, a poor, itinerant salesman who gives her a son, Nino, and then dies of cancer shortly afterward, leaving her in the near-poverty of her salary as a schoolteacher. It is the 1930's, when Mussolini has begun to imitate the racial policies of his German comrade, and Ida, half-Jewish, fears for herself and Nino. Gradually she, who has known no Jew except her mother, begins to frequent the Roman ghetto as if out of some protective herding instinct in the blood, like that of the animals to which characters in this book are constantly compared. And there she hears rumors, more terrifying daily, of what the Fascists have in store for the Jews of Rome. As these fears gather in her, Gunther appears on her doorstep. "And on meeting, at the very door of her home, that uniform which seemed stationed there, waiting for her, she thought she had arrived at the terrible rendezvous preordained for her since the beginning of the world."

In the scene that follows, the mutual incomprehension of Ida and Gunther throbs like an open wound. Once inside he seeks lamely, pathetically, some basis for friendship. As he inquires with shy politeness about a photograph of Nino that hangs on the wall, Ida is frozen in the expectation that he will produce a "Wanted" photo of her son. He takes her in a confusion of rage and tenderness, she has a relapse of her *petit mal*, leaving her in a numbness which he mistakes for willingness, and he takes her again, lovingly. When she recovers he is asleep upon her. "Even the sleep of her aggressor, stretched out there before her, seemed to rest on the leprosy of all experiences—violence, fear—like a healing."

If the power of such a scene—and there are dozens of others like it in this long book—comes from the human fullness of its portraits, Miss Morante is also the master of the quick sketch, of which again there are countless vivid and memorable examples. But to account fully for her success one must go behind these qualities—qualities that have to do with her indefatigable interest in who people are and how they behave—to her broader involvement with historical forces moving outside the self and acting upon it.

From its height, "history" bears down obliquely but insistently on these individual moments in obscure lives. Thus, Gunther, trying to ingratiate himself with her, shows Ida a snapshot of his family and his home: "Then, as [Ida's] eyes wandered over that anonymous group with dark apathy, he moved his finger to point out the landscape and sky in the background, informing her: 'Dachau.'" It happens to be his home. Again, one day when Ida visits the ghetto she finds it deserted; in her bewilderment, she tries to ask the news from a solitary Jewish woman she recognizes, who hurries on, refusing to acknowledge her. "Signora, I'm Jewish, too," Ida whispers, at which the woman runs off altogether. Ida follows her at a distance, and is led to the rear of the train station. A strange humming sound is heard, the mingled voices of a human mass, though there is no crowd in sight:

> The invisible voices were approaching and growing louder, even though they sounded somehow inaccessible, as if they came from an isolated and contaminated place. The sound suggested certain dins of kindergartens, hospitals, prisons: however, all jumbled together, like shards thrown into the same machine. At the end of the ramp, on a straight, dead track, a train was standing which, to Ida, seemed of endless length. The voices came from inside it.
>
> There were perhaps twenty cattle-cars, some wide open and empty, others closed with long iron bars over the outside doors. Following the standard design of such rolling-stock, the cars had no windows, except a tiny grilled opening up high. At each of those grilles, two hands could be seen clinging, or a pair of staring eyes.

Something crucial about Miss Morante's method can be observed in this passage. The reader knows this is the train to Auschwitz, but that is not the information he is given. Instead, he is forced into Ida's uncomprehending experience of what she sees and hears, the humming sound that grows louder, the two hands on a grille, a pair of eyes. Ida's ignorance of the future strips away the professional "history" of such events and bluntly and palpably puts their actuality before us; we burn with Ida in the cold light of dreadful fact.

Among our many received notions about contemporary fiction is the idea that modern historical reality is too much for the old narrative forms, too destructive and overwhelming for storytelling in the traditional mode. Walter Benjamin observed that men came back from World War I as they had come back from no previous war—with no stories to tell. What they had seen could not be narrated, though perhaps it could be mimicked in the dire hallucinations of surrealism, or rendered brokenly in one of the other discontinuous modes of modernist art. But plot, sequence, the integrity of character and action, and causality itself were no longer appropriate.

It is, therefore, stubbornly old-fashioned of Elsa Morante to take on the most powerfully disorienting moment in modern times and to treat it by means of a plot-idea, and central figures, and a style out of Tolstoy, Dickens, or Flaubert. This applies not only to Ida—who does indeed recall the heroine of a 19th-century novel, the innocent, battered woman-child struggling at the base of dark, towering ruins, like Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles—but also and especially to Giuseppe, the child conceived by Gunther and Ida in the first pages of the novel, who dies in its last. A frail, visionary child who has a precocious familiarity with loss

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and death, an instinctual closeness to animals, and a poetic enthusiasm for life, Giuseppe profoundly resembles the children of romantic poetry, or Dickens's Paul Dombey.

With Giuseppe's death scene some readers will inevitably feel that the novel has caved in under a load of anachronism and sentimentality. Yet this may be, rather, a sign of how jaded we have become in our responses to serious fiction. We have forgotten how searing an experience the work of art made flesh can be, how destructive of that distance between book and reader to which we have grown accustomed. *Gravity's Rainbow* is typical of what gets called a masterpiece today, because it is intellectually aggressive and demanding but emotionally blank. When a book tries to move us, and especially when it succeeds, we feel violated: Elsa Morante's novel is affecting enough to put vulnerabilities of this kind to the test.

History: A Novel recalls the fiction of an earlier age not just in its realism or in its direct assault on the emotions but in its overarching project. Its very title, as Robert Alter observed of it in the New York *Times Book Review*, "is something of a provocation. It take us back to an age when the novelist could confidently assume that he had authoritatively incorporated the actual movement of history into his imaginative inventions." Alter goes on:

> It seems to me that all the great 19th-century novels of politics and history—from *The Charterhouse of Parma* to *Middlemarch*, *Germinal*, *The Possessed*, and *War and Peace*—were built on some reasonably complex working hypothesis about what impels man as a political animal and about historical causation. Obviously I do not mean a "correct" hypothesis, but one sufficiently probing, subtle, and flexible to help the novelist represent men and women in the flux of history with a satisfying psychological and political amplitude.

Alter judges that, compared to the works he names, *History* fails because its "working hypothesis" is the too-simple one that "all history is a variation of Fascism and that all evil . . . is perpetrated by monolithic Powers." He cites the summaries of the course of world events that appear at the head of each chapter and cover the appropriate passage of time—these, he notes, "reflect a kind of simplified popular Marxism"—and also the views of a character named Davide Segre, a Jewish intellectual and anarchist who becomes a comrade of Nino's in the Resistance, and whom he takes as a spokesman for the author.

To this view it might be replied, first, that Segre is not any more (and may well be less) Miss Morante's spokesman than the child Giuseppe, who, in fact, in a climactic scene in a tavern, tries to lure Segre out of his ideological delirium and into the sunlight to play. Significantly, Segre does not even surface as a "thinker" until he is hooked on drugs, in flight from all real knowledge of the world. As for the brief historical summaries at the chapter headings, these surely do express Miss Morante's own politics directly, and they are too simple; yet on the whole they also seem to me much too terse, and too inexplicit, to represent a controlling "hypothesis."

Even in the work of the great 19th-century realists whom Alter mentions, distinguishing personal politics from the integral meaning of the novel is a difficult but necessary act. Is *The Charterhouse of Parma*, for instance, to be judged by the blur of nostalgias, slogans, and histrionics that erupt from its narrator again and again, or that passed for political ideation in Stendhal's mind? In *War and Peace*, to take another example, not only a hypothesis but an entire theory of history is elaborated in the opening chapters of each book. But that theory could be roughly paraphrased as saying what Miss Morante's novel is saying: that the amplitude of lived experience defeats the act of hypothesis-making.

Many of the greatest realists in fiction began by forswearing the attempt to contain their massive subject-matters. Stendhal and Tolstoy, instead of "capturing" the world and framing it in a manner suitable for hanging, deeply meditated its uncapturable essence and pursued it with vigorous, unshapely, catch-as-catch-can abandon. Miss Morante's *History: A Novel* is in their direct line of descent and bears the stamp of the best art: exalting life above itself.

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Books in Review

The Train of History

SHATTERED PEACE: THE ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE. By DANIEL YERGIN. *Houghton Mifflin. 526 pp. $15.00.*

Reviewed by EDWARD N. LUTTWAK

ORIGINALLY a Ph.D. thesis, the product of a solid course of study supervised or otherwise assisted by a large number of leading academics from Cambridge, Mass., Cambridge, England, New York, and Washington, and amply supported by seventy-six pages of detailed citations and a fairly elaborate bibliography, Daniel Yergin's book is nevertheless astonishingly free of any trace of genuine scholarship. No new evidence is presented and neither can any of the arguments claim the status of a significant new interpretation as is ordinarily required of doctoral dissertations. Instead we have much "human-interest" material, learning in the very first lines of the first page of the text that Roosevelt on his way to Yalta flew for nine hours, from Malta 400 miles away, that his plane landed on an "icy" runway at Saki, that he sat in the plane for twenty minutes until Churchill's aircraft landed also, that they then drove for five hours on a newly-paved road guarded by an "endless" line of soldiers, and that the climate changed abruptly as the coast was reached, the point being made by a Churchill quotation, very British and very un-Churchillian, about the weather.

None of the above was to be found, one presumes, in Yergin, Daniel H., "The Rise of the National Security State: Anti-Communism and the Origins of the Cold War," Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University, 1974, the original work duly listed in the bibliography. There is nothing wrong with rewriting a dissertation in light prose for the mass public, and inserting all the grainy detail required by *Time*-style; we all have to make a living. But book and dissertation share a fatal defect that owes nothing to commercial ambition, and which utterly invalidates both: in Dr. Yergin's story of the origins of the cold war, the sentiments and bureaucratic concerns of American policy-makers are all brightly illuminated before us, while the Soviet Union is a quiet offstage presence, its function being only to provide a plausible pretext for the main action, the rise of the "national security state" in America. It is not that Dr. Yergin deliberately intends to distort. He is no revisionist out to challenge the crude *Reader's Digest* version of the history of the postwar years with a still more distorted anti-anti-Communist version of his own. He is, rather, a victim of the prevailing academic fashions, of the sad decline of university scholarship, and of the ethnocentrism chronic in American intellectual circles.

The school of "bureaucratic analysis," whose promoters explain the making of state policy as the product of the contending interests of rival bureaucracies, has been in high fashion since *circa* 1971. Very useful to explain American foreign policy during the 60's, when decisions were indeed made in a decentralized fashion by rival bureaucracies in State, Defense, CIA, and NSC, the theory happened to receive its fullest exposition precisely when Nixon and Kissinger were about to make nonsense of its claims by acting on their own, virtually uninfluenced by bureaucratic pressures. But by then the bureaucratic-analysis school had acquired momentum, its leading exponents had acquired professional chairs, and there was in any case no healthier contending school in the flaccid chaos of American political science.

Unfortunately, if taken seriously, the bureaucratic-analysis approach has a narcotic effect on the student of foreign affairs. The Russian deployment of ultra-heavy SS-18 missiles is now, for example, being explained as the product of a tenacious struggle for survival by a particular Russian design bureau which happened to specialize in heavy missiles during the late 50's, and which has enough party influence to stay in business. This, as opposed to the old-fashioned "monolithic" explanation which links the deployment of the SS-18's to the Soviet pursuit of a counter-deterrent strategy, the function of these missiles being to destroy the Minuteman ICBM's of our land-based deterrent. Ostensibly the two approaches are compatible, but in practice the bureaucratic-analysis method has been used not to explain but rather to explain away, in arguing against a concrete American reaction to this particular threat. It is as if the meta-explanation somehow diminishes the real impact of the real event—whatever its motives.

IN Dr. Yergin's case, the narcotic effect is manifest throughout the book, where the (undoubted) personal and bureaucratic struggles over policy, and over the organization of postwar defense, so dominate the presentation that the grim reality of the Soviet Union is entirely obscured. As Wallace, Byrnes, Acheson, Truman, Roosevelt, Forrestal, *et al.*, are wheeled onto the scene to speak their lines, as the familiar old story of the army-air force/navy debate is retold along with many other old stories, the reader might well forget that the real action was all on the Soviet side, with the establishment of a ring of client states and the annexation of vast territories, both retained till this day.

The effect of a fashionable theory that provides pseudo-explanations is compounded by a sadly inadequate scholarship. Since there is a certain definite level of

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effort required to learn a foreign language, this modest but necessary tool of scholarship is naturally no longer an effective requirement for a postgraduate education. Dr. Yergin, like many others nowadays, has been allowed to write of U.S.-Soviet relations, and of Europe, while being innocent of a knowledge of Russian or of the other essential languages.

This sanctioned ignorance is reflected in Dr. Yergin's monolingual bibliography, and it compounds that peculiar phenomenon, the ethnocentrism of American liberals. While the Right ignores all the moral claims of all foreigners, the Left has a way of ignoring their very existence, attributing credit or blame only to fellow Americans, whether in the case of Vietnam or of the cold war.

It is for these reasons that Dr. Yergin's version of the origins of the cold war is little more than an optical delusion, in which the moving train of Russian power is made to appear still, while the reader, kept in the hesitant train of American decision, has the illusion of reciprocal movement. At the end of the book one may find the full evidence for this verdict. Having brought his entire story of diverse American prejudices, hopes, and interests to a culmination in the spring of 1950, with the drafting of NSC-68—a document which belatedly set out a comprehensive strategy for the containment of Soviet power—Dr. Yergin duly notes that Congress seemed unwilling to fund the rearmament which the new strategy required. American forces hurriedly demobilized by 1946 were very small and grossly underarmed; by 1950 their equipment was in many cases decrepit, and indeed American military power amounted to very little except for the atomic bomb, by then possessed by the Soviet Union also. NSC-68 advocated an effective deterrence, and this required the rebuilding of a realistic army, navy, and air force. Very likely the document would have remained a dead letter. But then an unexpected event occurred. I quote:

> The administration was still wrestling with the question of how to get funding for the NSC-68 program when, in the early morning hours of June 25, East Asian time, North Korea threw its troops across the border to the south.
>
> Thus began the Korean war.
>
> The administration certainly did not want that war, but once embroiled in the conflict, it did not hesitate to use it to promote the general build-up of American military strength.

There follows a gloating quote from *Aviation Week* on how well the aircraft industry was doing by December 1950. Then Dr. Yergin writes:

> With the Korean conflict, a new phase had opened in the cold war.
>
> With the expanded funding, the architecture of the national security state was complete.

So at last we finally discover exactly what is meant by that sinister phrase. A "national security state" is a state which has an army, a navy, and an air force, as well as a centralized intelligence department, a proper foreign office, and a unified department of defense. It took Pearl Harbor to endow the United States with these common attributes of external power which are so prosaic to the non-isolationist mind; all were then willfully dismantled in 1946 while a broad segment of European life was being handed over to the benevolent care of Josef Stalin. Americans of diverse opinions who feared the consequences of further Russian expansion then began to agitate for a policy of effective resistance by the United States. On the whole they failed, and Stalin unfortunately did not respect declaratory policies unsupported by effective military power. Then there is another Pearl Harbor, this time in Korea, and the United States rearms once again.

In other words, the real action in the "rise of the national security state" takes place in Tokyo 1940-41, Moscow 1939-1950, and perhaps in Pyongyang in 1950. What a pity that it cannot now be established how Kim Il Sung felt on the morning of the attack, or what Stalin wore as he watched Roosevelt's plane take off after Yalta. And of course there is a scarcity of those pungent quotes which the *Time*-style requires. But looking where the street lamp shines will not help to find the key dropped across the street.

Psycho-Physiology

THE DRAGONS OF EDEN: SPECULATIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN INTELLIGENCE. By CARL SAGAN. *Random House. 263 pp. $8.95.*

Reviewed by R. J. HERRNSTEIN

AMONG the ancients it was believed by some that the power of vision depended on invisible emanations issuing from our eyes and probing objects as blind people's canes do. At the dawn of modern science in the 16th century, René Descartes scraped the opaque coating off the back surface of a bull's eye and saw the upside-down image on the retina. To get the picture further in, to the inner sensorium, he credited the nerves. He believed that nerves were hollow tubes in which tiny filaments carried messages, in the case of mankind, to the seat of the human soul deep within the brain. Gusts of "animal spirits" blew down the nerves to the muscles to cause movement, said Descartes. Except for free will, the human body seemed to him a pneumatic machine. Pneumatic toys were in vogue in France in his time.

By the turn of the 20th century, science had passed well beyond Descartes. Nerves were known to be composed of tiny electrical cells, neurons, each supposedly capable of only two states, firing and not firing. Vision, for example, was thought by many scientists to be nothing but neurons firing in the visual part of a nervous system, often likened in the early 20th century to a miniaturized telephone switchboard. In fact, the entire human nervous system, with its billions of neurons, was supposedly nothing but a switchboard with a staggering potential for making connections (and presumably also wrong numbers). Carl Sagan (an

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astronomer who ventured far out of his field to write this popular psychology) supplements the telephone analogy with the by-now familiar idea that the cerebral hemispheres of the brain are like computers, a digital computer for one hemisphere and an analogue computer for the other. This analogy expresses the finding that speech and perhaps other logical or quasi-logical processes are localized in one brain hemisphere, while musical perceptions and perhaps other sorts of non- or pre-logical processes are localized in the other. The separation of functions into two hemispheres is not as sharp, or as well documented, as popular accounts would have it, but that need not occupy us here.

The quick scan of 2000 years of psycho-physiologizing should suggest two simple lessons about this subject. First, scientific analogies come from the available hardware, from canes to computers. In each age, people's hunches about the physical basis of mind are limited by the physical knowledge of their time. Second, it would be rash to suppose that today's analogies are here to stay. Speculation about the physical basis of mind has been going on for millennia without long resting with any particular theory. Indeed, Professor Sagan is a bit out of date, for scientists at the frontiers of psycho-physiology are thinking about chemical machines and holographic computers (neither digital nor analogue, but something quite new) as possible models for the still largely unexplained mysteries of the nervous system.

Physical speculation about the mind has never lagged far behind the evolution of hardware. At present, we still do not know the whole story about how nervous tissue achieves any psychological function except, in a few instances, the conversion of physical stimulation into sensory-nerve impulses. This has been no minor accomplishment, and has properly been celebrated with several Nobel Prizes and other signs of scientific preeminence. While science has learned many things about the nervous system itself—its architecture, its maturation, its chemistry, and its physics—I believe it is fair to say that we still do not know what kind of machine it is as it mediates a creature's psychology. We are not even sure if its psychological functions are purely neuronal or whether other kinds of brain cells—the non-neural glia in particular—are involved. There has been plenty of progress—the brain is closer to a computer than to a pneumatic pump with valves—but there may still be a long way to go.

LIKE many non-specialist popularizers of psychology, Professor Sagan overestimates our physiological knowledge and underestimates our psychological knowledge. I'll get back to this point later. First, I must acknowledge that Professor

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Sagan has taken the first hard step in learning psychology. The first step in studying psychology is to convince yourself that there is something to study, above and beyond common sense and common knowledge. Professor Sagan likes the theory of the "triune brain," as formulated by a neurophysiologist named Paul MacLean in the early 1950's. Not an active theory in the technical literature these days, it nevertheless appeals to popularizers. I used a bit of it myself in an introductory textbook I co-authored, though I did not give it nearly the weight it has here. The theory depicts the human brain as combining in uneasy equilibrium our reptilian ancestry, our pre-human mammalian ancestry, and our rational, competent selves. A reptile, a mammal, and a human reason within each skin—with these wild cards, Professor Sagan can play just about any hand he wants.

Tripartite psychologies are hardly new. Aristotle used three souls—the vegetative, the animal, and the rational; Sigmund Freud used the id, ego, and superego; W. H. Sheldon, the modern body-typer, uses three temperaments—viscerotonia, somatotonia, and cerebrotonia. I have not counted, but there must be at least a dozen major psychological systems based on tripartite divisions and very few based on any number other than three. Why is this? I'm not sure I know the answer, but I'd guess that it has little to do with the facts of matter.

Let us first consider the evidence for the triune theory. A tripartite division of the human brain has been used by certain anatomists: the cerebral cortex at the top, the lower brain stem at the bottom, and something called the limbic system in between. As anatomy, there is nothing compelling about this particular subdivision, rather than, say, the fivefold subdivision that I learned in my anatomy course in college. In fact, it is not even quite complete, for it omits the cerebellum, a large brain structure whose functions include at the least the coordination of movement. But granting the anatomy, there is still no reason for saying anything more than that the human brain is an evolutionary extension of earlier nervous systems, including not only mammalian and reptilian, but probably also those of fish, worms, and so on. But exactly the same thing could be said of the rest of our bodies. Our limbs harken back to the fins of fish, our bilateral symmetry to the bilateral symmetry of worms. Every species has the brain to go with the rest of its body, one that evolved over eons in specific environmental circumstances, and so it is with us. Only the loosest sort of pseudo-evolutionism would permit one to say that the lower brain of a human being is psychologically reptilian, and I am not even sure that it means anything in any event. It is one thing to have the brain of a rattlesnake in us and quite another if the reptile is a herbivorous dinosaur.

THE first problem with this book's tripartite psychology is, then, its inherent weakness. Another is that, as psychology as distinguished from anatomy, it is no match for Freud's or Sheldon's or even Aristotle's. It appeals to brain anatomy while trying to say something about human behavior. They are not the same, although non-psychologists and beginning psychology students looking for a scientific psychology almost always gravitate to physiology and anatomy. Anatomy and physiology are tangible and technical, and biologists generally enjoy higher status in the academic pecking order than psychologists. It takes conscious effort and a certain amount of sheer study to resist the lure of physiologizing and to see that a creature's psychology not only can, but must, be studied in its own right before scientific sense can be made of it. When he physiologizes his psychological hunches, Professor Sagan is investing his hunches with specious authority from a "harder" science.

The triune brain probably appeals to Professor Sagan because it seems to jibe with his psychological intuition. It captures in an evolutionary metaphor the idea that conflicting motives, conflicting values, and conflicting forms of knowledge are the human condition. Many of the other tripartite psychologies are also metaphors expressing more or less the same idea. Without further evidence, one metaphor is about as good as another, assuming we are after science, not poetry. The evidence must, moreover, be psychological. Except for a review of language in chimpanzees, *The Dragons of Eden* lacks psychological data. Besides anatomy, there is paleontology, geology, garnishes of astronomy, chemistry, and physics, but almost no psychology.

FOR psychology, Professor Sagan mostly relies on intuition. His intuitions are not unreasonable; he believes we possess both logical and alogical tendencies, that we are not as rational as we think we are, that we are conscious of only a fraction of the psychic forces that move us, that some of our psychology is adaptive for a world that no longer exists, that human relationships resemble to some extent relationships among other animals. But it is a pity that Professor Sagan has ignored the evidence that refines and transcends those sensible (though hardly original) hunches of his. Even more, it is a pity that Professor Sagan has ignored the rich, growing, often surprising and occasionally sobering discipline of psychology. But then, I have yet to stumble across a popularizer who knows much psychology, let alone bothers to popularize it. Fortunately for Professor Sagan, his book will not often be reviewed by a psychologist, judging from current practice in our leading newspapers and magazines. The editors who choose reviewers are generally even more innocent of psychology than the popularizers who write about it. They consequently share the impression that psychological "knowledge" consists mainly of intuition bolstered by casual observations and introspection. And they consequently will find nothing odd about a psychology book by an astronomer being reviewed by novelists, biochemists, and mathematicians. If the popular psychology conforms to popular political or moral lessons, so much the better. In contrast, psychologists who think their data could add something to common sense are often handled rather roughly when they surface above the technical litera-

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ture, particularly when the message is unwelcome.

Professor Sagan can rest easy; his message will trouble very few (except the occasional psychologist who looks at the book). For example, Professor Sagan comments in the course of his discussion of the frontal lobes of the brain:

> Cassandric components of our nature are necessary for survival. The doctrines for regulating the future that they produced are the origins of ethics, magic, science, and legal codes. The benefit of foreseeing catastrophe is the ability to take steps to avoid it, sacrificing short-term for long-term benefits. A society that is, as a result of such foresight, materially secure generates the leisure time necessary for social and technological innovation.

Indeed, but did we need to know the gross anatomy of the brain to say this? And what, in fact, *are* the bases of ethics, magic, science, and legal codes? How does an organism, human or otherwise, learn to sacrifice short-term for long-term benefits? What are the relevant abilities, and what are the limitations on the abilities? Would it surprise Professor Sagan to learn that there are data, real data, about the *psychology* (rather than the pseudo-physiology) of ethics, magic, and all the rest in this little passage? It would certainly surprise those of his readers who are relying on him for finding out about human psychology.

Psychology left the armchair for good at about the time of World War II, under the press of wartime needs for psychological testing, counseling, and the effective design of instruments and training procedures. There have been many elegant, perhaps occasionally important, discoveries in thirty years, and, of course, vastly more pedestrian work of no great moment. Psychologists are excited these days about research that measures the speed of thought (not nerve impulses, but thought itself), the information in mental (not retinal, but mental) images, the necessary and sufficient conditions for learning, the relationships among desire, gain, and action, the attributes of sensation, the percepts of animals,

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the relations between language and experience, the varieties and growth of moral reasoning, the dynamics of social encounters, the uses of reward and punishment in psychotherapy, and so on. A popular psychology should not only speak to non-specialists but should tell them things they do not already know, even at the risk of reshaping their views of themselves in relation to each other and to the physical and biological world around them.

Though he knows how profoundly science can change our picture of the world, Professor Sagan seems not to realize that the psychological shift in outlook promises to be deeper, broader, and at times more difficult to accept than the Copernican and Darwinian ones were. Once again, people are to confront a science that challenges their egocentricity, but this time it is their very sense of themselves and their personal destinies that are to be challenged, not such relatively secondary possessions as the planet on which, or the bodies in which, they live. The intensity of their resistance is already apparent in their alarmed reactions to B. F. Skinner's conditioning procedures or A. R. Jensen's assessments of individual differences in cognitive ability. None of this surfaces in, or even ripples the surface of, Professor Sagan's book. He is asking his readers to change their minds about almost nothing, though doing so wih grace, humor, and style.

O Brave New World

LOOSE CHANGE: THREE WOMEN OF THE SIXTIES By SARA DAVIDSON. *Doubleday. 367 pp. $9.50.*

Reviewed by JANE LARKIN CRAIN

SARA DAVIDSON was graduated from the University of California in 1964, at about the time beatniks were becoming hippies and the staid and earnest civil-rights movement was giving way to the New Left. After a year at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, she landed a job on the Boston *Globe*, and soon branched out into freelance writing for magazines like *Harper's*, the *Atlantic*, *Esquire*, and *Life*, publications eager for the sort of news about the young and their goings-on that this sympathetic and articulate spokesman could deliver. At twenty-seven, she was cited by *Harper's Bazaar* as one of "A hundred women in touch with our time—a deft evaluator of the current scene."

Indeed, in *Loose Change*, a portrait of the adventures she and two of her sorority sisters enjoyed during the 60's, Miss Davidson proves herself one who eagerly embraced what she experienced as that decade's revolutionary spirit. Her book covers all the familiar landmarks of the 60's—Woodstock Nation, flower-power in Haight Ashbury, Altamont, the Summer of Love, Eastern religious cults, sex, the drug culture, encounter groups, the anti-war movement, Women's Liberation, rock stars, back-to-the-land communes, the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, riots at Columbia, and so on.

For Miss Davidson and the others chronicled in *Loose Change*, these sundry phenomena comprised a time of high hope and excitement, one that would usher in a new era characterized by a universal dedication to social reform, open, honest, and loving relationships, a shattering of sexual taboos, and an uncompromising disdain for the grubby pursuit of money, power, and career. That new era never arrived, and in writing *Loose Change*, Miss Davidson hoped to find out what went wrong and why. To this end she sought out two girls she had lived with at college: Susie Hersh Berman, veteran of the radical student movement at Berkeley, and Natasha Taylor, a chic New York art dealer.

Susie, Natasha, and Sara had all come to Berkeley from pretty much the same background. Raised in sun-washed Los Angeles, they had in common affluence, good looks,

JANE LARKIN CRAIN's *criticism has appeared in* COMMENTARY, Saturday Review, *and the New York* Times Book Review.

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popularity, a loving and indulgent upbringing. As undergraduates, however, each resolved to renounce the easy suburban future to which she had been born and bred, vowing, instead, to experience life to the fullest and not be "hampered by convention." Under the influence of Jeff Berman, a rising "star" in radical student politics, Susie developed a commitment to the "revolution"; Natasha forewent the life of a doctor's wife to pursue a career in New York; and Sara set out to make it as a journalist of the counterculture.

Miss Davidson stresses her belief that the girls' bid for liberation was unprecedented and commendable, but the road to freedom was a rocky one, spelling trouble for all three; they suffered anxiety over their careers, unhappy love affairs and marriages, and the general erosion of their youthful élan. Yet despite it all, each, as she approached thirty, began to see the pieces of her life coming together. Divorcing Jeff, Susie set off for Southeast Asia and Taos, New Mexico, seeking her "identity." She is back in Berkeley now, enrolled in medical school on an affirmative-action program to meet the "need" for women doctors. Natasha, breaking off a difficult relationship with a famous and wealthy sculptor, became a successful art dealer and married the man of her dreams. Sara, also divorced from her husband, a New York radio personality, "hibernated" for four years to write this book, and is once again living in Los Angeles and feeling good about her prospects.

FOR ALL the tribulations endured, then, Miss Davidson looks back on the 60's as a time of confidence and exhilaration, and on herself and her peers as a "generation that was special . . . that had sprung from nowhere . . . that had glimpsed a new world where nothing would be the same." She contrasts these great times, with their optimism, energy, and certainty, with the dismal 70's, when young people are caught up instead in a "cross-generational obsession with money and security." Yet even a reader otherwise disposed to give Miss Davidson the benefit of the doubt could not help but notice that her book tends to show that things are in fact the other way around.

Unconventionality? These free spirits of the 60's would put a suburban housewife to shame. They fret endlessly about their looks, their wardrobes, their boyfriends and spouses. They are obsessed with home furnishing (Miss Davidson expends more real tears over a purple sofa that she gives up in her divorce proceedings than over the assassination of Robert Kennedy), dishes that have to be washed, meals cooked, how to scintillate at parties, find and keep the right man. A shattering of sexual taboos? Their sex lives are dreadful; they can't have orgasms, and they seem to think about nothing else; they're anxious about the length of their legs and the size of their breasts; their husbands have lost interest, their lovers neglect and oppress them. An uncompromising disdain for the grubby pursuit of money, power, and career? The level of their status anxiety, their concern for their place in the world—what it is, how to advance it—would astonish the most gray-flanneled climber of the 50's. Having come from money, all three continue in its thrall; Natasha and Sara especially are as attuned to the cost and quality of things as auctioneers, and *Loose Change* is as preoccupied with pricey merchandise as a Bloomingdale's catalogue. They follow the course of their careers and social standing like stockbrokers at the ticker tape, eyes open for the main chance. Open, honest, and loving relationships? Under the influence of some cultic religion or other Miss Davidson has determined to "honor the divinity in people." She makes a stunning exception in the case of her husband, offering up for public consumption the sexual and emotional intimacies of their life together in a manner calculated to honor the worm, or the fool, in him, but precious little else.

What sighs through the pages of this book, as it seems to have done through the lives of these petulant and mindless girls, is not any buoyant revolutionary spirit but simple self-absorption—that, and an unfailing ability to wind up where the

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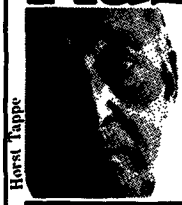
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money and glamor are. The only difference in these girls' lives between the 60's and the 70's is that in the 60's they could not acknowledge what they were after, and hence were miserable much of the time, whereas in the 70's they can (if only implicitly) and so have found happiness at last.

As for reality, political and cultural reality, and all those high public events—Vietnam, the civil-rights movement, the counterculture—that supposedly gave this period its meaning, these figure in *Loose Change* only as signposts in a private landscape, seized upon as occasions for self-dramatization on the part of one or another character, or providing Miss Davidson with material for magazine articles. The "revolution" of the 60's is nowhere to be found here, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it exists only as a function of the particular mood Natasha, or Sara, or Susie happens to be in on the morning of any particular day. Did it figure any more seriously in the lives of any other members of that generation? Miss Davidson's book gives cause for doubt. But at least we know now what these young women of the 60's are asking of us, as they stride ever resolutely onward to their brave new world: first, what should they wear; second, how should they decorate it.

Growing Up Orthodox

WAKE UP, WAKE UP, TO DO THE WORK OF THE CREATOR. By WILLIAM B. HELMREICH. *Harper & Row. 210 pp. $8.95.*

Reviewed by JAMES H. LEHMANN

WHEN Mimi Sheraton, the New York *Times* food critic, writes that there are 83 kosher restaurants in New York and adds (realizing it does make a difference) that one of the most famous of them, while strictly kosher, is not *glatt* kosher, then one knows that the New Orthodoxy has arrived. The statistics of this phenomenon, at least, are impressive enough: more than 6,500 students of the Talmud at the post-high-school level, academies of advanced learning springing up even in the Sun Belt, day schools that now account for fully one-fifth of all students receiving a Jewish education, and a host of institutions, from the most spiritual to the most mundane, adapting themselves to a more fervent and adamant religiosity.

The view one takes of these developments is likely to depend on one's own religious predispositions, but whatever one's view, it remains the case that the phenomenon of the New Orthodoxy of the postwar period has been too little studied. A 1965 article by Charles S. Liebman in the *American Jewish Year Book* remains the standard work, now supplemented by the recent essays of David Singer in COMMENTARY.* As for imaginative depictions of Orthodox life, we have had to do thus far with the writing of Chaim Potok, who is, to say the least, somewhat deficient as a chronicler. So far there has been nothing that resembles a literate account from *within* the New Orthodox camp itself—at least not until this attempt by William B. Helmreich.

Helmreich, born in 1945 to survivors of the Holocaust, was brought to this country as an infant, and *Wake Up, Wake Up, to Do the Work of the Creator* is a recollection of growing up Orthodox on New York's Upper West Side in the 1950's. The memoir focuses on the years immediately before and after bar mitzvah—years in which Helmreich attended a yeshivah day school, played and studied at a very Orthodox summer camp, and, finally, spent a crucial year at a yeshivah whose name appears here as "Gates of Israel." Throughout, Helmreich tries to convey the quality of Orthodox life by describing in elaborate detail the observance of Sabbaths and festivals in his home. The book thus proceeds through the Jewish calendar, informing the reader about Orthodox practice and attempting to communicate as well the "feel" of Orthodox life.

A fateful year for the young Helmreich was the one in which he left New York for his freshman year of high school at "Gates of Israel." Helmreich's elementary school had been a "modern institution, by Orthodox standards," at which boys and girls together undertook a double program of general and Jewish studies. There, Helmreich had acquired the basics of a Jewish education, ranging from an initiation into the mysteries of the Talmud to the *bricolage* of day-school culture: trips to the Jewish Museum, TV appearances on the Sunday religious hour, inspection tours of matzah factories. There was no conflict between the observant life as taught in school and as practiced at home. This "balanced" world was tipped somewhat when Helmreich went off to camp. There he met boys from less "modern" backgrounds than his own (unlike his school, the camp was segregated by sex); and when, after wandering into a neighboring bungalow colony and befriending a girl, he was severely reprimanded by his counselor, he came to see that being Orthodox was more problematic than he had been led to think. A counselor "who exemplified everything I wanted to be" advised the young man to enter "Gates of Israel," "an institution approximately two hundred miles from New York and universally recognized as belonging to the 'Ivy League' of such institutions," there to become a better Jew.

At "Gates of Israel," Helmreich entered a new world, with new styles of dress ("large black *yarmulkes*, plain pants and jackets, white shirts open at the collar, with woolen fringes hanging down the waist at both ends") and a new and apparently negative attitude to secular study. He came to believe that "the brand of Orthodoxy practiced by those in [his elementary school] was as different from that to which I was now being exposed as it was from the non-Orthodox Jewish community." After a year of allowing himself to become absorbed in the intense study of "Torah for Torah's sake," he decided to leave, not out of religious rebellion but out of a desire

JAMES H. LEHMANN *is a graduate student in comparative literature at Yale.*

* See, for example, "The Growth of the Day-School Movement," August 1973; "Voices of Orthodoxy," July 1974; "The Yeshivah World," October 1976.

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to devote more time to secular subjects. As the book ends, the author has come home to the more "acceptable" Orthodoxy of his parents.

IN FOCUSING on day school, summer camp, and yeshivah, Helmreich's memoir is valuable in suggesting how the New Orthodoxy even two decades ago was sufficiently institutionalized to make its present growth comprehensible. Equally useful is the book's delineation of the tensions that exist between the Orthodox laity and the life it has made for itself in the United States on the one hand, and many of the institutions which that laity has built up on the other.

Unfortunately, Helmreich's memoir suffers from his decision to portray the New Orthodoxy in terms of a child's experience. The first fatality of this decision is the book's narrative style, which wavers hopelessly between what the author imagines to be the way a child thinks and records experience and a clumsily ironic commentary that is supposed to embody the voice of maturity. Another and more serious problem arising out of the same "child's-eye" view of things is the persistent reliance on stereotyped situations and characterizations, at the expense of any more complex or nuanced portrayal of what the New Orthodox life is actually like. Thus, the young and innocent yeshivah student is beset, Potok-like, by the twin temptations of "science" ("As my geography teacher discussed life in faraway lands... I was gripped by a desire to know more about them") and sensuality ("I found myself unable to speak to, yet unable to draw away from contact with, this girl who became the embodiment of my dreams and desires"). The mawkish tone here carries over to the sentimentalizing of religious life at home, as holidays become "an oasis of joy amid the dreariness of New York City's tenements," or "an island in the midst of an alien world."

The strait-jacketed, black-jacketed institution Helmreich portrays as "Gates of Israel" is actually (as my own one-year experience there, and the experience of many others, can attest), a much richer, more human, more interesting place than one would suspect from this book. For every student who thought of nothing but the day's Talmud lesson there was another who thought of a great deal more; above all, there was a widespread attempt to make sense of the role of a yeshivah training when its professed ideological aim—"every student a future talmudic giant"—was patently preposterous.

Helmreich confines himself to an analysis of yeshivah life in terms of pubescent conflicts, and neglects the vastly more intriguing issues raised by that life for contemporary Orthodoxy. Although *Wake Up, Wake Up* . . . tells us in great detail about the daily routine of the yeshivah, it never quite puts its finger on what distinguishes the "Gates of Israel" from the world of Helmreich's parents and elementary school. The crux of the matter is that the latter world holds out the promise of combining a life of religious observance with general education, college, and professional advancement—briefly, the middle-class dream as it is dreamed by Orthodox Jews—while the former entails a single-minded commitment to study for its own sake that effectively forecloses any such dream. Attending yeshivah, in other words, is as much a social and economic choice as it is a religious one. The important question about the New Orthodox is how they make this choice once they reach an age—considerably later than Helmreich suggests—when they can do so in a reasonably independent and socially meaningful way.

Today's Orthodox are at once more acculturated to America and less acculturated than their predecessors. Charles S. Liebman pointed out in 1965 that "the Orthodox who value secular education only for its vocational benefits have in a sense deliberately rejected acculturation," but today a confluence of factors—among them the general decline of the old ideal of liberal education and the corresponding professional and vocational orientation of undergraduate education, the growth and legitimation of Jewish studies within the academy, and the proliferation of career opportunities in various Jewish communal institutions—has enabled

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many Orthodox individuals to attain positions that carry prestige and social status while remaining within the Orthodox fold. The tensions and contradictions inherent in *this* situation—one in which a growing number of Jews are both a part and not a part of American society in a new and distinctive way—offer a prime subject for investigation by a rigorous sociology and a perceptive imagination. Helmreich's memoir only vaguely suggests the outlines of this subject.

Challenge to the New Order

THE INEQUALITY OF NATIONS. By ROBERT W. TUCKER. *Basic Books. 214 pp. $10.95.*

Reviewed by MICHAEL LEDEEN

THIS SHORT and extremely well-reasoned book was written, as Robert W. Tucker announces at the outset, "out of protest against the intellectual confusion that has attended current discussions of equality in relation to international society." It succeeds brilliantly.

As the current wisdom has it, we are in the midst of a great revolution in international relations. It is said that this revolution will transform, and has in large part already transformed, the international system from one of gross inequality among nations to one of greater equality and justice. Whether this claim is made on the basis of the shifting balance of economic power (exemplified by the OPEC cartel and its ability to blackmail the industrialized nations) or on moral grounds (like the statement of John P. Lewis, "there is not a modern social ethic anywhere that could pretend to provide enduring justification for the existing, let alone worsening, inequality in international income distribution"), the net effect is the same. The revolution we are living through, it is maintained, will produce a new international order, in which sovereign states are increasingly interdependent, where resort to force becomes increasingly less frequent, and where gross disparities in the standard of living become increasingly rare.

Tucker offers a reasoned reply to this scenario. In the first place, he writes, the new egalitarianism is not challenging the essential structure of international relations. The claims made by the critics of the existing system are rarely, if ever, made on behalf of individuals searching for greater justice, but are invariably pronounced in the name of nation-states seeking a larger share of the world's riches and enhanced power and prestige. Thus, Tucker says, what is actually being challenged by the emerging nations is "the distribution of wealth and power within the system."

Second, although it claims to be producing a new order, the "revolution" will in fact produce disorder. Greater interdependence increases the number of the forces producing chaos. At the same time, the diminished ability of the powerful nations to exercise their strength enhances the ability of the less powerful to throw monkey wrenches into the system.

Third, the challenge to the present order comes not from the poor, but from formerly poor states whose growing wealth gives them new power. "It is not at all apparent," Tucker writes with considerable understatement, "how helping the latter would thereby ease the problems such interdependencies have created."

Fourth, the notion of freedom is strikingly absent from discussions of the new order. "It is the persistence of material disparities that commands primary attention rather than the persisting denial of personal freedoms. . . ."

This bring us to the real cutting edge of Tucker's analysis, and it is unfortunate that he spends so little time on it (perhaps because it is so obvious to him that he assumes, I fear mistakenly, that it will be equally obvious to his readers). For it is clear that the demands for the new order are specifically directed at the wealthy Western nations to share their bounty with the poorer (but not the poor) nations of the South. Indeed, at the so-called North-South Conference in Paris last June, the developing nations asked for vastly greater amounts of Western aid, refused to discuss the question of oil prices, and swallowed (without a word) the remarkable position of the Soviet Union that any aid to developing nations had to come from democratic countries and not from the totalitarian bloc.

What is going on, under the rhetorical umbrella of the "new economic order," is the old game of acquiring and using power. The so-called egalitarianism of the new states, as Tucker wisely observes, "is not—and cannot be—directed against the hierarchical character *per se* of international society but against the particular hierarchical ordering that characterizes the present system." In other words, the new order is finally indistinguishable from the old.

The old international order, based on notions of sovereignty stemming from the 18th and 19th centuries, held that a state's independence depended in the final analysis on its ability to defend itself. To put the matter as bluntly as possible, sovereignty meant sufficient strength to wage war successfully whenever one's vital interests were threatened. This concept has only been seriously questioned in the post-World War II period with the introduction of nuclear weapons, which, it is said, make the waging of total war an unacceptable act.

This does not mean that military *power* is irrelevant. To the contrary, military might has continued to be an indispensable element of national sovereignty, but the standard for measuring it has changed. Power has come increasingly to be measured in nuclear terms, and to the extent that the possession of nuclear weapons is the privilege of a few, those excluded from the "nuclear club" become relegated to the minor leagues of nations. True equality (which is to say, roughly equivalent power) can never exist between two nations if one of them has nuclear weapons and the other has only conventional arms.

In the nuclear age, power is not just a function of economic strength—indeed, militarily power-

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ful nations may be economically quite second-rate, as in the case of the Soviet Union; conversely, an economic superpower like Japan is militarily feeble. Power in the modern era means the ability to obtain and wield thermonuclear weapons, and there will be no new order truly satisfactory to the newly powerful nations until nuclear proliferation has taken place. Tucker spells this out in characteristically concise form:

> For those who are able to pursue it, the logic of equality is ultimately the logic of nuclear proliferation. In turn, the logic of nuclear proliferation is one of decreasing control over the international system by those who are its present guardians.

IN the long run, then, the demand for greater equality among nations will mean more of what we have had in the past, except with less control, greater risks, and, since many more nations will have the "right" to threaten nuclear war, increased chaos. Like the hierarchies of the past, this new one will be ushered in on a flood of romantic verbiage designed to assure one and all that true democracy has finally been achieved. This, however, is unlikely, if only because most of the developing nations show little understanding of, or interest in, real democracy. All the more reason, then, to listen to Tucker, for the myths about the nature of the world order which he systematically exposes and refutes in this book have come to dominate the political rhetoric not only of the developing nations themselves (who use them as a standard and a rallying cry) but of influential sectors in the West as well.

The campaign for the new order is being fought, for the moment, largely with words. The proponents of the new order have found a formidable opponent in Robert W. Tucker, and his admirable little book deserves the widest possible hearing. Thus far, however, it has been greeted with almost complete silence—three months after this book was published it had still not been noticed in any of the major reviewing media, despite the importance of the subject and the great reputation of the author. For once, the advocates of the new world system have taken a page from the old textbooks on strategy. From Caesar to Napoleon, wise generals have avoided pitched battles against superior forces.

Prejudices & Principles

TAKING RIGHTS SERIOUSLY. By RONALD DWORKIN. *Harvard University Press. 320 pp. $12.00.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM J. BENNETT

IN RECENT years, appeals to rights on the part of individuals and groups have reached tidal proportions; Daniel Bell has referred to the swell of such claims as a "revolution." Not all these appeals are political; the rights "revolution" has also penetrated places like the family and the classroom, where once the whole issue of rights would not have been thought to belong. For example, in Lawrence Kohlberg's influential program of cognitive moral development, which has many adherents among college and school teachers, maturity is viewed as the capacity to focus on moral problems exclusively in reference to the rights of parties involved in disputes. There are books about the rights of children "against" their parents, the rights of interest groups, and even the rights of animals. In much of this there is a tendency to reduce very complex matters to single-factor explanations.

Ronald Dworkin, in *Taking Rights Seriously,* offers a justification for this trend as it applies to law and politics. In a connected series of articles he argues that individuals have rights which exist prior to any "explicit legislation"; that the most fundamental of these rights is the right to equality; and

WILLIAM J. BENNETT *is executive officer of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina.*

They were the original Palestinian terrorists.

TERROR OUT OF ZION

J. BOWYER BELL

Betrayed by the British, attacked by Arab mobs, cut off even from many of their own people, the men and women who dreamed of a homeland for the world's oppressed Jews turned to the only means left to make their vision a reality: guerrilla warfare in Palestine. Bowyer Bell interviewed the veterans of this struggle—former members of the *Irgun* and other groups—to write their history in all its dramatic detail.
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that even though no "mechanical procedure" exists for demonstrating what these rights are, claims for them are plausible and are to be taken seriously.

IN making a case for these propositions, Dworkin offers a sustained critique of the doctrine of judicial restraint associated with Justices Holmes, Brandeis, and Frankfurter and with the thought of Alexander M. Bickel. This doctrine, according to Dworkin, holds that political institutions other than courts should decide the strength and weight of rights. This, he says, is wrong, since rights are often opposed to what the majority wants; since it is "inconsistent and unjust" to have the majority decide its own case; and since political processes have shown themselves to be an ineffective check on violations of peoples' rights, especially those of minorities. Our constitutional system, Dworkin maintains, rests on the premise that men have rights *against* the state; this, he says, is the position properly taken by the Warren Court.

To illustrate where he differs from those who call for judicial restraint and place their faith in the political process, Dworkin cites the "free-speech" issue that arose in the testing of the anti-riot law in the trial of the Chicago Seven. Whereas, he asserts, someone who believes that a balance should be struck between personal rights and the general good would defend the anti-riot law by saying that it leaves an individual free to express his opinions in a non-provocative way, this answer "misses the point."

> A man cannot express himself freely when he cannot match his rhetoric to his outrage, or when he must trim his sails to protect values he counts as nothing next to those he is trying to vindicate. It is true that some political dissenters speak in ways that shock the majority, but it is arrogant for the majority to suppose that the orthodox methods of expression are the proper ways to speak, for this is a denial of equal concern and respect.

For Dworkin, this case is telling evidence that the majority is often hostile to the rights of minorities, and that the "rights thesis" is needed to defend them.

ACCORDING to Dworkin, the reason many intelligent people do not understand the "rights thesis" is that they do not appreciate a necessary fusion of constitutional law and moral theory which "incredibly, has yet to take place." In a chapter entitled "Justice and Rights," he refers to John Rawls's articulation, in *A Theory of Justice*, of the idea of the "original position." This idea "imagines a group of men and women who come together to form a social contract." If these men and women are rational and are acting only in their own self-interest, they will choose two principles of justice to guide themselves by, the first of which is "that every person must have the largest political liberty compatible with the like liberty for all," and the second of which is "that inequalities in power, wealth, income, and other resources must not exist except insofar as they work to the absolute benefit of the worst-off members of society." The conditions embodied in the "original position" are, to Dworkin, the fundamental principles governing our moral powers and our sense of justice. Constitutions and their amendments are "derivative" of these; "such rights as men do have" cannot be affected by the mere passing of a law.

Dworkin believes his view has important implications for civil disobedience. He says that just because something has been made or confirmed a law is not decisive for action; in fact, he argues that in the United States, any law which a significant number of people are tempted to disobey on moral grounds will be for that very reason a doubtful law, if not clearly invalid. Governments, moreover, have "special responsibilities" to those who act on a reasonable judgment of the invalidity of laws. Not, however, that *every* dissenter should be so protected: the moral doubts of the segregationist who stands in the schoolhouse door do not have the same standing as the doubts of the Chicago Seven, for the segregationist violates rights which have been "confirmed by law." The chapter on civil disobedience ends by underlining the responsibility of the government to these who disobey the draft laws out of conscience; Dworkin says we may have to change our laws to accommodate these people.

Dworkin also takes up the implications of the "rights thesis" for reverse discrimination. A social or educational policy is justified, Dworkin says, if it "respects the right of all members of the community to be treated as equals but not otherwise." This, it might seem, would put Dworkin *against* preferential programs based on race alone—but not so. The aim of a preferential admissions program, he says, is to "decrease the difference in wealth and power that now exists between different racial groups, and so make the community more equal overall"; such a program is therefore in line with the principle of the right to equal treatment, in Dworkin's view, since it complies with the demands of the "original position." As for those whites who suffer from preferential admissions for blacks, their political loss is outweighed by gains to the community as a whole.

Dworkin states that beside the right to equal treatment there is also a right to "treatment as an equal," the right "to be treated with the same respect or concern as anyone else." He finds that the rights of whites who suffer a political loss on account of reverse discrimination are satisfied if that loss is treated as "a matter of concern." On this issue, Dworkin's argument, dealing as it does in a calculus of gains to the community, would appear to put him in the camp of the utilitarians, to whom he is in general opposed. He insists, however, that to argue for a policy that will make the community more equal and just is not utilitarian but has to do with ideals that are grounded, once again, in the "original position."

In his concluding two chapters, Dworkin considers a few "spurious" claims to rights, foremost among them the claim of a "right to liberty" which is believed by many to be more fundamental than the right of equality. Dworkin finds this belief "misguided," and says it is "absurd to suppose that men and

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women have any general right to liberty at all" (this, despite his professed adherence to Rawls's principles of justice, one of which promises the individual the "largest" political liberty compatible with the like liberty for all). There is evidence, in Dworkin's view, that the demand for and the interest in liberty are psychologically damaging: for his authority he cites R. D. Laing, who believes that "the need to choose, which follows from liberty, is an unnecessary source of destructive tension."

THE "rights thesis" as it is argued by Dworkin is unoriginal and unproven, from beginning to end. To begin at the beginning, his characterizations of the judicial-restraint position are more nearly caricature than accurate description. Only mindless and totally discredited theories of extreme legal realism would deny that the courts have a responsibility to affirm fundamental principles and rights. Certainly none of those whom Dworkin names—from Justice Holmes to Alexander M. Bickel—has maintained that the courts should not be vigorous in the enforcement of rights. Equally preposterous is the notion that before John Rawls came along there was a paucity of illuminating works on the conjunction of constitutional law and moral theory. Among American judges, Holmes, Brandeis, Hand, Cardozo, and Frankfurter, and among American legal thinkers, Corwin, Freund, Hurst, and especially Lon Fuller—any one of these far surpasses Dworkin in the field of jurisprudence (notwithstanding Marshall Cohen's ludicrous claim in a review that this book is "the most sophisticated contribution to [jurisprudence] yet made by an American writer").

Dworkin's method of arguing is disingenuous and irresponsible, and his standards of judgment shift whenever it suits him. Thus, the strong, consistent, and emphatic belief of many that screaming obscenities in the street is wrong is not enough in his view to justify legislation against it, but elsewhere precisely such recalcitrance of belief counts as a powerful argument for his own positions. In addition, the

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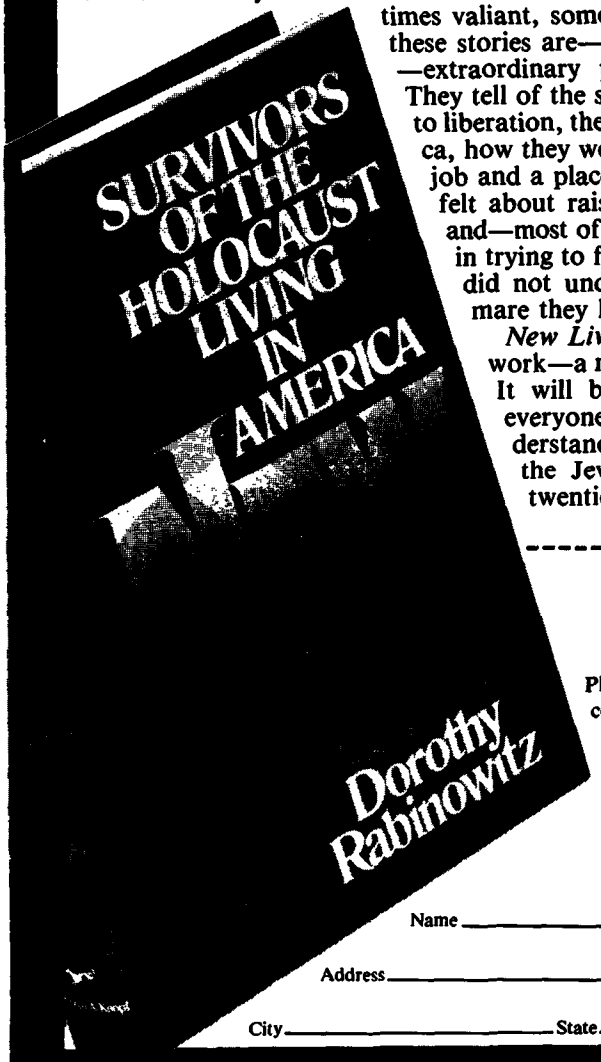

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burden of proof is always placed on the position Dworkin happens to oppose—that certain homosexual acts should be outlawed, that there is a right of property and a right to liberty, that the use of racial criteria is dangerous—but little or no evidence is offered for *his* claims—for example, that liberty is damaging, that racial criteria are a sound basis for an academic selection process, or that there are two different rights to equality. The positions he supports need only be "plausible," while the positions he opposes require something like mechanical demonstration.

How "plausible" *are* Dworkin's positions? Those that deviate from established constitutional doctrine depend upon the prior plausibility of Rawls's "original position." Dworkin himself admits that men and women in the "original position" might not really choose Rawls's principles for themselves, but he simply decides to "ignore the point," since many of those who have written about Rawls's book do find the "original position" compelling and they include a large number of "those who think about justice at all." But it is not at all clear that anyone would choose the feckless options Rawls proposes and Dworkin ratifies. It would be just as "rational" to decide, for example, that a society should aim for distinctions of excellence and character among men, which would in turn necessarily result in some inequalities.

When it is proposed, as it is by Dworkin, that something as substantial as the United States Constitution be taken as "derivative" of a phantom "original position," it is not unfair to insist that the proposal meet a certain burden of proof. Yet Dworkin jumps unconcernedly from a hypothesis which admits of no demonstration and which appears to have been invented out of whole cloth to an entire series of positions and policies about the real world for which he then claims the authority of his original hypothesis. This is the sort of nonsense which Orwell said only an intellectual could believe.

The discussion of reverse discrimination makes it clear that there is nothing like a deductive system at work in this book. Here the reader is told for the first time of the difference between the right to equal treatment and the right to treatment as an equal. How this distinction derives from the "original position" is not shown. As with the right to "dignity," the alleged invasion of the personal rights of the Chicago Seven, the arbitrary disallowing of the segregationist who acts against rights "confirmed in law," distinctions are made in order to justify a predetermined result. In Dworkin's case, ideology precedes and does not follow from principle or theory.

APART from all this, there are at least four things wrong with the "rights thesis."

First, although it is surely one major purpose of a constitutional republic to protect rights, there are other, equally important, purposes to be served, such as preserving security, liberty, and justice (the characteristics of a civil society as we know it). Some flexibility is needed to adjust competing demands for rights and liberties, and also to take into account such considerations as continuity, growth, stability, and a respect for the opinions of men. Continual balancing and weighing are required, even with regard to rights, especially when, as is often the case, more than one right is involved. When James Madison penned his warning about the tyranny of the majority, he was speaking not out of a belief that the purpose of government was *primarily* to protect the rights of minorities, but out of a belief that the rights of minorities could be forgotten amid so many other compelling considerations. Whether Dworkin likes it or not, politics, in all branches, is the business of accommodation.

Second, by urging a policy of judical hyper-activism in the defense of rights, Dworkin piles a heaping load on an already very full plate. The Court, and the lower courts, are asked to do too much. Even with their present agenda they run a serious risk of breaking down. It is foolish and self-defeating to recommend a course of action which is bound to fail in the real world and bound also to frustrate the achievement—the protection of rights—Dworkin claims to prize.

Third, Dworkin's theorems do not apply to the mixed form of American government, in whose division of powers all branches must respect arguments of prinicple as well as arguments of policy. Dworkin's notion that the courts are the main safeguard of principle, while the other branches are mindful only of policy considerations, is wrong; we regard it, in fact, as a terrible deviation when the legislature or the executive (as in the Watergate episode) ignores principles and acts solely out of "policy" in its deliberations and actions. Similary, the Court is not obligated to act out of what it alone takes to be self-evident principles and to ignore important social policies and "collective goals" as presented by others. In both theory and practice, the American division of powers is much sounder and more complex than Dworkin's interpretation of it.

Fourth, Dworkin denigrates and underestimates the views of the people. The United States, as a society, has taken rights very seriously. Clearly, the courts have done much in this regard, as they have followed Hamilton's (not Dworkin's) exhortation in the *Federalist* to hold to an "inflexible and uniform adherence to the rights of the Constitution, and of individuals" and to "declare all acts contrary to the manifest tenor of the Constitution void." But in characterizing majority and popular views as consistently inimical to rights, and in urging the courts to be the sole or major advocate of rights, Dworkin threatens the underpinnings of a free, self-governing society. As Felix Frankfurter, admittedly an advocate of judicial restraint, put it: "Holding democracy in judicial tutelage is not the most promising way to foster disciplined responsibility in a people."

If the courts pay no heed to the people's sense and to its exercising of its responsibilities, in the end the people will pay no heed to the courts and their exercising of theirs. And if a regard for rights, among other things, does not thrive in the people apart from the courts, the affirmation of rights in the courts will be fruitless.

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Democrat

THE TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION. By JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL. Translated by DAVID HAPGOOD. *Doubleday. 311 pp. $8.95.*

Reviewed by STEPHEN HASELER

JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL is in the Orwell tradition—a European socialist implacably opposed to Communism—and *The Totalitarian Temptation* is, accordingly, an essay in heresy. Indeed, so central is its challenge to the accepted wisdom of those European intellectuals who are now busily in the process of discovering that socialism and Communism are but differing sects of the same orthodoxy that Revel might seem to be expelling himself from the church altogether. Thus he declares, in the very first sentence of the book, that "the main obstacle to socialism is not capitalism but Communism," and he proceeds to argue, in the teeth of all fashion, that the whole Communist world is—still, today—Stalinist at the core, and to explain why the advance of Communism meets with so little resistance.

The blame for the "docility toward Stalinism," at least in Western Europe, is placed by Revel firmly on the shoulders of the non-Communist Left. He wastes little effort on disguising his contempt for those European socialists who make ritual disclaimers about Stalin himself but increasingly embrace the tradition, the world order, which he alone made possible. This, for Revel, is the meaning of the "pidgin Marxism" that goes by the name of Eurocommunism.

Revel (once but no longer a member of the French Socialist party) is particularly dismissive of François Mitterrand for cravenness toward the French Communists. He simply does not accept that the French Communist party has been "de-Russified," and even if it were, he argues, the simple proclamation of "national roads" to Communism, roads unlinked to Moscow, changes nothing. China and Albania, which are even more totalitarian than the Soviet Union itself, have proved that. The key is not de-Russification, but rather *democratization*, and of this there seems precious little hope because any relaxation of "democratic centralism" would threaten the very existence of the Western Communist parties. And what is true of French Communism, according to Revel, is true of the Italian and Spanish varieties as well.

If Stalinism is on the march in Western Europe, then in much of the Third World, Revel finds, it has already arrived. He depicts many of the leaders of the less-developed nations as "history's most remarkable herd of new rulers who are freebooters in their origins and authoritarian in their practices."

STEPHEN HASELER *is a Labor member of the Greater London Council and the author of* The Death of British Democracy.

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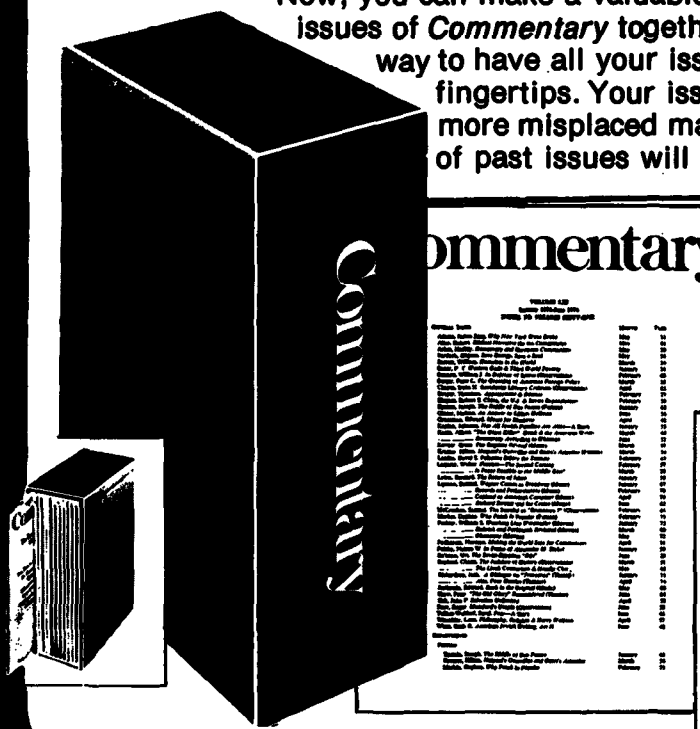

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As against Daniel P. Moynihan, who in "The United States in Opposition" (COMMENTARY, March 1975) located the political ideology of those rulers in the tradition of Fabian socialism, Revel suggests rather that Third World leftism is a "Stalinist stew of reactionary statism and verbal socialism."

IN ONE sense, Revel is simply an old-fashioned 1950's social democrat reacting to the new willingness of European socialists to work and enter into governing coalitions with the Communists. Yet what distinguishes Revel from the earlier generation of democratic (and therefore anti-Communist) socialists, and indeed from Orwell too, is his undeniable attraction to both capitalism and the United States. He is not only prepared to defend the United States against the more unbalanced and hysterical condemnations of the Left. He is actually pro-American—and not just by way of comparison with alternative systems. He believes that the United States represents the highest form of political civilization yet known to history, and believes too—as he argued in an earlier work, *Without Marx or Jesus*—that only in the United States can the next revolutionary advance take place. Revel, in effect, stands orthodox thinking on its head: he is a revolutionary who asserts that real change can only come out of a society that is open to change, that is not inert, bureaucratic, quasi-feudal, centralized, and dogmatized, as he believes all Communist societies to be.

As with the political system of the United States, so with its economic system. Capitalism, to the self-proclaimed socialist Revel, is the most materially abundant and morally acceptable economic system yet devised. He argues, like Marx, that socialism must take root within capitalism, but, unlike Marx, that it can only "develop by outgrowing—not destroying—capitalist civilization, while preserving its cornerstones: the capacity to produce, and political, individual, and cultural freedoms." He is very certain that capitalism and political democracy go together. In fact, he asserts that political democracy "clings to its [capitalism's] back" and that no other economic system has so far effectively carried democracy along with it.

ALL this points up a central ambiguity in Revel's position. Believing as he does that capitalism is so attractive, that political democracy coexists with it as it coexists with no other economic system, that the United States is a force for good, and that the United States and its economic system are under challenge all over the planet from Stalinism, why should he continue calling himself a socialist?

"We have a surplus of definitions of socialism," Revel writes; "what is lacking are examples of socialism." And again: "There is no such thing as socialism, there is only evidence of socialism. And no such thing as democracy, only evidence of democracy." Yet this finally begs the question. If indeed there are no examples of true socialism in practice; if, as Revel spends so much time proclaiming, all existing socialist systems have been twisted, distorted, and abused—then why bother with the term at all? Courageous as Revel is in taking on the myths of his contemporaries—and he is among the most courageous political intellectuals of our time—it may be that even he lacks the courage to risk a wholesale dissociation from the ruling socialist church. Be that as it may, however, Revel stands out as a shining force for reason and democracy amid a European intelligentsia which is rapidly rejecting both reason and the heritage of democratic freedom.

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The Effects of Ice on Scotch

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by Allen Mac Kenzie

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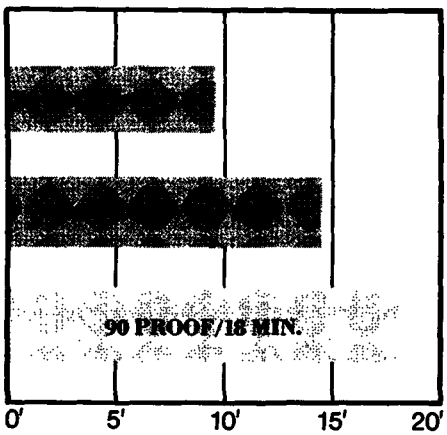
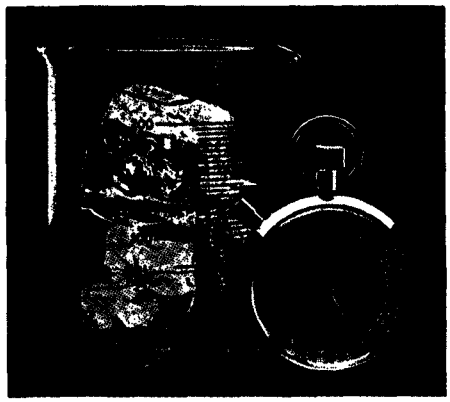
Pursuing a Perfect Proof

Let's turn our attention first to the proof at which Scotch whisky is bottled. Consider, if you will, the possibility that there is a better proof for on-the-rocks Scotch drinking than that of your current brand.

Practically every Scotch sold in this country is bottled, at 80, 86, or 86.8 Proof. So at the instant you pour Scotch over ice, it contains between 40% and 43.4% alcohol by volume. (Proof is double the percentage of alcohol.) The chilling effect of the ice is accompanied by dilution. And when your drink has been properly cooled —in 30 seconds to a minute—you achieve what one Scotch connoisseur refers to as "the ideal sip." From then on, the Scotch drinker's enjoyment typically runs downhill, as the drink loses its freshness.



TIME IT TAKES THREE DIFFERENT SCOTCHES TO DILUTE TO 45 PROOF WHEN POURED OVER ICE(IN MINUTES.)



While there is no way to preserve that fresh Scotch flavor indefinitely, we submit that you can sustain the freshness substantially longer with 90-Proof *Famous Grouse*. If you have never heard of this brand, we are not surprised. It is a well established name in Scotland, but only recently introduced to America. So far as we know, *Famous Grouse* is the only Scotch now available in this country at 90 Proof.

How Fast Does the Proof Fall?

To illustrate the merits of a slightly higher proof, we chilled a jigger of Scotch (about 1.7 ounces) with 6 one-inch ice cubes. We measured the amount of water added to the Scotch after each minute and computed the change in proof.

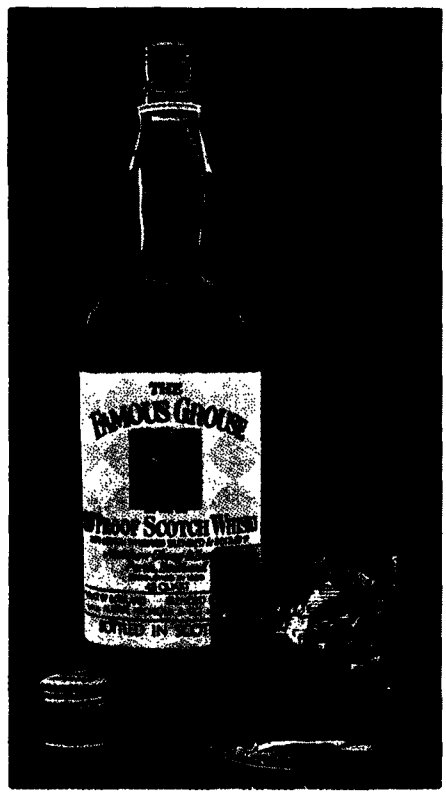
As you might expect, the proof falls rapidly during the first few minutes of cooling, but more slowly after the whisky is chilled. The diagram shows how long it takes Scotches of three different proofs to reach 45 proof when poured over ice. If proof is considered to be a measure of freshness, 90-Proof *Famous Grouse* has a 3½ minute advantage over 86.8-Proof Scotch after 18 minutes on the rocks. (Because it takes 3½ minutes longer to reach 45 proof.) Its advantage over 80-Proof Scotch is 8½ minutes.

Proof, of course, is not the only influence on the flavor of a blended Scotch. The proportion of malt to grain whiskies, origins of the malts, aging methods—these are also important factors determining the relative richness of Scotch flavor.

The makers of *Famous Grouse*—Matthew Gloag & Son of Perth, Scotland —have been producing Scotch in the same family for six generations. And they have performed their most noble feat in the rich blend they created for *Famous Grouse* Scotch. Its flavor—so remarkable at the outset—holds firmly to its character during prolonged contact with ice.

Knowledge of Scotch, however, cannot be indefinitely pursued in the abstract. Your learning process must ultimately include a leisurely sip of *Famous Grouse* on the rocks. For Scotch drinking is one of those pleasures enjoyed most, not in the pursuit, but in the conquest. Scotland's greatest bard, Robert Burns, said it best:

"Gie me a spark o' Nature's fire,
That's a' the learning I desire."



90 PROOF. BLENDED SCOTCH WHISKY. BOTTLED IN SCOTLAND. IMPORTED BY AUSTIN, NICHOLS & CO., LAWRENCEBURG, KY.

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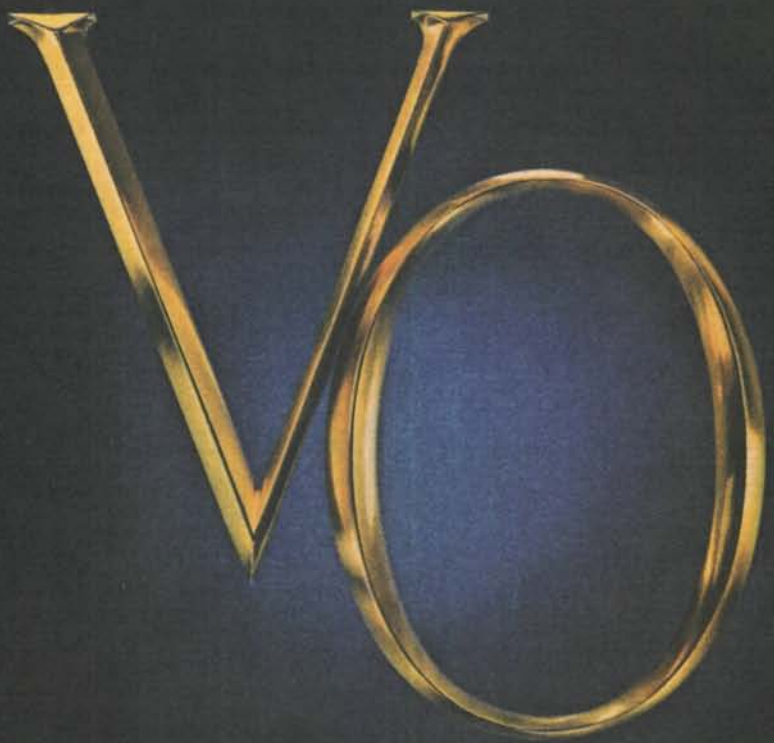
While you've been working your way up for all these years, we've been quietly waiting for you to arrive.



Seagram's V.O.

Bottled in Canada. Preferred throughout the world.

CANADIAN WHISKY. A BLEND OF CANADA'S FINEST WHISKIES. 6 YEARS OLD. 86.8 PROOF. SEAGRAM DISTILLERS CO., N.Y.C.

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